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A Cuban Aleph: Reflections of Contemporary Cuban Identity
in the Work of Porno Para Ricardo

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Abstract

This dissertation focuses primarily on controversial punk band 'Porno Para Ricardo', using them as a case study to illuminate some of the complex networks that comprise contemporary Cuban cultural identity. The introduction and conclusion frame each chapter's close-analysis of songs from the band's oeuvre with an ethnographic contextualisation of aspects of 'the everyday' in contemporary Havana, and gives a brief history of the ways in which the band has been forced by state hegemony to a position 'outside the Revolution'. Despite this treatment, and despite the band's often vehement criticisms of Cuban nationalism and socialist dogma, they still share much of the same 'obsession' with defining a sense of national identity that pervades Cuban art and culture.

This work also proposes viewing Porno Para Ricardo as an 'Aleph' of Cuban identity, after the short story of Argentinean writer Jorge Luis Borges. In Borges' work, the Aleph is a small point in which all of space is condensed and can be seen simultaneously. I tentatively (and aware of the real-world limitations) suggest using a band so ostensibly 'outside' of the space of Cuban cultural identity as a point through which to examine the whole. Each chapter then provides a glimpse through this proposed Aleph to examine moments of dialogue between the band and aspects of contemporary Cuban identity construction: uses of remembrance, attachment to place, affiliation to subculture, cover versions, laughter and noise.

Dedicado a Mariley

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Introduction

Where had we been? Where were we going? I'm never quite sure. With the constant blinding heat, and with even the most mundane of errands becoming an inevitable treasure hunt, my sense of purpose tends to get lost between the shade of trees on these crumbling Havana streets. And as also often happens, where we were going was not where we ended up.

Darting between oases of shade, up a shallow hill bleached white by the sun, we ducked down an intersecting road where the roots of the trees burst through concrete and make an angular terrain of the pavement; shards and fragments; blocks and rubble. Opposite a little park running up the side of the hill - thick grass a deep green and intricate wrought iron benches, rusting – stood an apartment block that looked narrower than it should have been for its height. It gleamed with glass and white tiles. Each of the five floors had a balcony looking out over the street. Only the top balcony was occupied, indeed the rest of the street was entirely deserted. The figure wore shorts and a wild crop of black hair and leaned out over the balcony rail with a practiced ease.

We called out to him, he didn't reply.

We walked a little closer, sticking to the shade, and called again.

We hadn't meant to be here, to walk past his house. He hadn't meant to have visitors, but plans change. He invited us up.

And I met Cuban punk Gorki Águila, lead singer of "the most censored band on the island" Porno Para Ricardo.

* * *

To begin with something of a punk sentiment¹, I define what this dissertation is *not*.

¹ Following Karen Pinkus' description of punk as found in John Lydon's autobiography as "a series of negatives drawn around misperceptions of the various performances". (1996:187)

It is not a treatise on the redefinition of Cuban music, nor Cuban national identity. It is neither a castigation of the revolutionary regime that has subjugated the presence of rock music within Cuba, nor a lament at the supposed ‘globalisation’ (or in more pejorative terms the ‘Americanisation’) of Cuban culture. It is neither an ethnography of an isolated and exotic example of musicality on a Caribbean island, nor an assertion that such music is a ubiquitous phenomenon capable of defining (or integral to any definition of) contemporary Cuban identity. It is not a biography of a great band making complex and intriguing music.

Rather than attempting to illuminate an entire field, this dissertation plays a modest light through a single prism to give tentative conclusions about the nature of identity at the intersections of the individual, the local (or subcultural) the national and the global. It takes the work of one band – the controversial Cuban punk band ‘Porno Para Ricardo’ - not necessarily because of their significance within Cuban music, nor because of their anomalous nature, and not because of their ability to define contemporary Cuban culture or society in its entirety, but because played out in their music is an often overlooked process of identity construction, and that identity may reflect something of the state of contemporary Cuban society and culture. An identity is being made and disseminated through their music. That identity depends upon certain shared cultural markers, which in turn make sense only in relation to the signs and signifiers of a national collective consciousness. Whether these symbols are reclaimed, remembered, parodied, deconstructed, augmented or enjoyed, serves as a prism through which to make discoveries about how identity is constructed and disseminated, how it is made to make sense by others through shared points of reference and how these diverse points of reference are connected and collated in diverse and complex networks. But it may also shed some light on one particular *version* of national identity; one perception, one commentary and critique of the environment – local, national and global – which has informed the identity construction, and to which the identity construction is a response.

In this sense, one band may become something of an ‘Aleph’, in the sense of Jorge Luis Borges’ short story; a small point through which the whole may be viewed (Borges 1945).

In the wake of the tumult of Cuba’s Special Period², where many of the social, economic and political codes long established by the Revolution were severely compromised, it is

² The ‘*Periodo Especial*’ (Special Period), though not a topic addressed discretely and with all the importance it deserves, is an ever-present spectre in this work, as it is in any aspect of contemporary Cuban studies. An analysis of Porno Para Ricardo’s remembrances of aspects of the Special Period is addressed in Chapter One. The Special Period is the name given to the time of crisis, near-famine, scarcity in all areas of life, and another

perhaps little wonder that a significant group of Cubans from younger generations sought new musical and cultural codes through which to define themselves as individuals, and as smaller subcultural collectives. Though rock music has arguably been a consistent visitor to the Cuban soundworld, albeit one that has at various points in history been criminalised, marginalised, subjugated, rallied against and vehemently denied, the new millennium has seen rock music, in its variegated generic guises, become a significant cultural sign to a large proportion of Cuban youth. Many of the cultural symbols of rock have permeated into the fabric of more ‘traditional’ genres of Cuban music, and many young Cubans – banded together under the broad rubric *‘freaki’*; a hispanicised rendering of the English word ‘freaky’ which is given as a label to often diverse rock subcultures – have taken rock music as a definitive point in their personal identity constructions.

So that this dissertation concentrates on the work of a punk band who define themselves through a broad cultural palette incorporating (or perhaps juxtaposing) symbols of Cuban traditional music, U.S. and British punk, an uncompromisingly Cuban and irreverently forthright socio-political lyrical commentary, parodied images of Soviet and Cuban revolutionary slogans, images and rhetoric, captured fragments of the quotidian Cuban soundscape, commentaries on the prevalence of radio, and fantasy sonic renderings that mix that same Cuban everyday world with the hyperbole of the Hollywood film, is perhaps less surprising than it may first appear. That this band exist in something of a liminal position within Cuban society – notorious, but hardly famous, considered dissident, but hardly affecting change, providing a clear and vehement social commentary and political castigation of the Revolution, yet with little proactive support and exacting little influence on the rest of the Cuban music scene – is perhaps similarly unsurprising. They have been forced (or in a sense have forced themselves) into that most absolute of positions: “outside the Revolution”, exemplifying one of Fidel Castro’s most famous maxims in practice:

Within the Revolution, everything goes; against the Revolution, nothing. Nothing against the Revolution, because the Revolution has its rights also, and the first right of the Revolution is the right to exist, and no one can stand against the right of the Revolution to be and to exist, No one can rightfully claim a right against the

vast and traumatic exodus of rafters across the Straits of Florida that began with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 and continued throughout the early-to-mid 90s (exact end points are impossible to mark out, and in many aspects, a compelling argument could be made that the Special Period is still an on-going process). Numerous writers have made the Special Period the focus of their work, including Gott, 2004, Molyneux, 1996, and Nasatir, 2008. Louis Perez perhaps sums up the significance of the Special Period best when writing it “will no doubt be remembered as one of those temporal divides by which people experience the momentous transitions of a historical epoch. The *período especial* has served to demarcate the life of a generation, to persist hereafter as the reference point by which people often make those profoundly personal distinctions about their lives as ‘before’ and ‘after’” (Perez, 2006:xi).

Revolution. Since it takes in the interests of the people and signifies the interests of the entire nation.

I believe that this is quite clear. What are the rights of revolutionary or non-revolutionary writers and artists? Within the Revolution, everything; against the Revolution, no rights at all (Fidel Castro, 'Words to the Intellectuals' 1961).

Though removed from the relative sanctity of being musicians 'within', though deeply critical of the rhetoric that enforces such politically motivated boundaries and barriers, the concept of what constitutes a Cuban identity seems to be an ever-present visitor to their soundworld. Porno Para Ricardo appear to be as critical of the *inauthenticity* of many '*frikis*' in speaking of contemporary Cuban issues, as they are of the *authenticity* of the rigidly defined parameters of Cuba's 'traditional genres' to do the same job. In the construction of a punk-Cubanness (or a Cuban-punk aesthetic), Porno Para Ricardo do not seek to negate or deny the presence of 'authentic Cuban traits', nor to 'reterritorialise' such a space to include themselves, yet the inherent Cubanness of their music is always a central concern. It is the goal of this dissertation to examine moments in the band's work where aspects of Cuban identity are addressed, not to attempt to redefine the whole, nor to attempt to demonstrate how one band may affect such redefinition, but rather to glimpse a reflection of contemporary Cubanness through something of a 'Cuban Aleph'.

Literature Review: Music and Identity

How identities are constructed through, shaped by, shared within, disseminated by, put in conflict against and affected by music, and how musics are shaped, understood and shared by different identity groups (and individuals) are topics that have occupied much research and writing within popular music studies and ethnomusicology. Although, as Timothy Rice notes, the topic has occupied ethnomusicologist only "relatively recently", the "relationship between identity and music [has become] a major theme in our field" (2007:18-19). Rice's article attempts its own literature review of the subject of identity and music; even with the constraints of examining only articles published with 'Ethnomusicology' and only articles with the word 'identity' in the title, the vast topic is made more problematic by the fact that "articles neither cite the general literature on identity nor one another (2007:17).

Nevertheless, identity, and its expression through musical performance (in the broadest sense, to incorporate all aspects of aesthetic representation) is a central concern of this work.

It would be beyond the purview of this dissertation to write extensively on the concept of music and identity more broadly. Indeed, each chapter of this work contains within it a short, more specific, literature review, each of which focuses on the particular musical

trope (remembrance, place, subculture, cover versions, laughter and noise respectively) and their use in constructing, reflecting and disseminating identity within music. Here, then, I wish to only highlight some of the overarching themes of identity in music running through this work, and the texts which have proved central to this thesis. Firstly, citing Roland Barthes (1977) and Dick Hebdige (1979), this work asserts the ability of music (particularly an ‘oppositional’ musical genre such as punk) to reclaim and reinterpret symbols of national identity. Following on from this, citing particularly Simon Frith (1996) and Jacques Attali (1985), I suggest a cyclical interaction between music and identity spaces, in which music is determined by the space in which it is made, and in turn, new iterations can serve to shape and redefine cultural spaces. Citing, Whitely et al. (2004) and Connell and Gibson (2003), I assert the importance of place in shaping and housing musical identities, but also the need to recognise the multiplicity of identities and musics occupying place. To conclude, I turn to the words of the Cuban ethnomusicologist Fernando Ortiz (1947 [1995]), who still occupies a significant space in the contemporary cultural landscape of Cuba, in asserting the prominence and pertinence of his term ‘transculturation’ to describe the process of musical dissemination and application within Cuba specifically, but within the complex fields of music and identity more generally.

Redrawing the Map

As discussed in more specific terms in the following section, popular music occupies a potent and hugely significant place in the construction and reflection of many types of particularly *Cuban* identity, not least in revolutionary discussions of national identity (see Masvidal, 2008 Perez, 1999 Astley, 2012). Popular music has become one particularly potent and present tool in describing a sense of national identity within Cuba. A set of shared cultural markers is laid down, a wealth of unique (and uniquely Cuban) talent is extolled. An identity is constructed through this pantheon of Cuban Greats. And it is an identity with strong undertones of political power. Music then becomes not only allied to a particular political stance, but to an identity; to a shared, albeit often tacitly formulated, construction of the nation. Popular music becomes the message and the means of conveying that message; a shared point on the cultural map, capable of housing and reiterating certain symbolic codes and conventions of Cuban cultural life³.

But popular music, and this is overtly expressed in the work of Porno Para Ricardo, also has an ability to subvert these symbols, to play with these codes and reinterpret them. And

³ One might think specifically of the *clave* rhythm in Cuba, or lyrics extolling places of natural beauty, topics addressed in Chapters Four and Two respectively.

in so doing, it has the ability to make visible some of the often ‘hidden’ and tacitly accepted markers of identity. In understanding this potent, potentially disruptive, power of popular music in reformulating identities, I am particularly drawn to Dick Hebdige’s, ‘Subculture: The Meaning of Style’. In this work, Hebdige maps out how popular music, by reclaiming and recontextualising the symbols of the everyday, can subvert power structures and reuse cultural texts to define new identities and relationships.

Hebdige begins by citing Roland Barthes seminal text ‘Mythologies’. For Hebdige, Barthes’ work begins to unpick some of the tacit identity constructions that are governed by those in power, and are made universal. In Hebdige’s words, “Barthes sets out in *Mythologies* to examine the normally hidden set of rules, codes and conventions through which meanings particular to specific social groups (i.e. those in power) are rendered universal and ‘given’ for the whole of society” (Hebdige, 1979:9). This is apparent in much popular music, particularly within iterations of Cuba’s traditional genres, *son*, *mambo*, *rumba*, etc. As discussed below, there is a tendency to assign these genres, these rhythms, a certain universality as innately and all-encompassingly Cuban.

So, whatever else might be said of popular music and identity, it might be said that its use can often contain within it an ideology. And, as Valentine Volosinov writes:

The domain of ideology coincides with the domain of signs. They equate with one another. Whenever a sign is present, ideology is present too. Everything ideological possesses a semiotic value (Volosinov, 1973:10)

What this means to popular music practice and identity is that the wealth of codes and signs that constitute music – the rhythms, the lyrics, instrumentation etc – are representative of ideologies, and alongside these ideologies, particularly within Cuba, are identities, and particularly ideas of national identity. Thus, music becomes a powerful tool in formulating and communicating Cubanness.

And yet, as Porno Para Ricardo, alongside a wide range of Cuban composers, musicians and “musicking” (Christopher Small, 1998) audiences and listeners, attest, these ideologies and identities, these very symbols and codes, can be – and often are – reclaimed and reused in subversive and ingenious ways⁴ to ‘mean’ something else; to express different, and multiple, identities. As Hebdige again notes:

these ‘maps of meaning’ are charged with a potentially explosive significance because they are traced and re-traced along the lines laid down by the *dominant* discourses about reality, the *dominant* ideologies. They thus tend to represent, in

⁴ Indeed, this ingenious reusing of everyday elements to create something new – in a very literal sense – has become a prerequisite of Cuban everyday life. See Chapter Three, and Astley, 2012b.

however obscure and contradictory a fashion, the interests of the *dominant* social group (Hebdige, 1979:15).

And so, a redrawing of these ‘maps of meaning’ is a divergence from the dominant discourse, a divergence from dominant constructions and conceptions of identity. As Roland Barthes eloquently puts it, “texts, rather than simply being consumed, are ‘played’ and ‘played with’” (Barthes, 1977:162). This stands not only for the material ‘texts’ of everyday life that are ‘played’ and ‘played with’ constantly within Cuba, often as a matter of logistical necessity, but also with formulations of popular music and the identities associated with them.

Popular music then has the power to represent and reflect codes and signs of ideologies, but it also has the equally important power to subvert and disrupt them, a trope particularly important, as Hebdige’s work attests, to the genre of punk. Punk’s power comes from its ability to reclaim and reuse certain cultural texts, working them together in a new, often confusing and contradictory, bricolage, to both claim and reorder, aspects of dominant ideology and concepts of identity. In Hebdige’s words, “commodities can be symbolically ‘repossessed’ in everyday life, and endowed with implicitly oppositional meanings... ‘humble objects’ can be magically appropriated; ‘stolen’ by subordinate groups and made to carry ‘secret’ meanings” (1979:16-18). As will be discussed throughout this dissertation, Porno Para Ricardo’s punk aesthetic relies heavily on their ability to repossess cultural symbols of the everyday, and to repurpose them – to ‘play’ with them, in Barthes’ words – to describe and define new senses of national identity.

Reflecting and Producing Identity

As numerous cultural theorists have pointed out, as described below, defining a sense of national identity has become something of an ‘obsession’ in much of Cuban art, not least its popular music (Kapcia, 2000 Arango, 1997, Hernandez and Dilla 1992). Popular music, then, holds a significant potential to its makers and its audiences to house identities and ideologies. But it also has the ability to be reappropriated and made to mean something different in new cultural contexts by new cultural actors, an issue particularly pertinent to popular music as global, and increasingly globally accessible, cultural texts. Simon Frith’s essay ‘*Music and Identity*’ (1996) discusses these issues of musical creation, ownership and appropriation, raising crucial questions regarding the ability of music to mean something to its ‘creators’, but also the problematic process of musical travel:

The problem here is not just the familiar postmodern point that we live in an age of plunder in which musics made in one place for one reason can be immediately appropriated in another place for quite another reason, but also that while music may be *shaped* by the people who first make and use it, as experience it has a life of its own. (1996:109)

It is a point similarly made by both Martin Stokes, who writes that “music... do[es] not simply ‘reflect’” (1994:4) and John Shepherd, who writes music “does not ‘carry’ its meaning and ‘give it’ to participants and listeners. Affect and meaning have to be created anew in the specific social and historical circumstances of music’s creation and use” (1993:138). Frith goes on to write that one problem with “the academic study of popular music” is that it “has been limited by the assumption that the sounds must somehow ‘reflect’ or ‘represent’ the people. The analytic problem has been to trace the connections back, from the work... to the social groups who produce and consume it” (Frith, 1996:108). Such a problem with the study of identity in popular music studies is of relevance in this work. The popular music perspective of identity construction as outlined by Frith presents a kind of one-way street of influence: identities produce musics which ‘reflect’ identities. Frith suggests a model of analysis which would:

reverse the usual academic and critical argument: the issue is not how a particular piece of music or a performance reflects the people, but how it produces them, how it creates and constructs an experience (1996:109).

Frith’s suggestion reverses the direction of influence from identity to music by suggesting that musics might serve to shape the identities, and the boundaries drawn around certain ‘identity groups’. However, this dissertation seeks to promote a kind of two-way process, or a cyclical feedback loop, of popular music and identity; one that examines how musical practice reflects a broader Cuban cultural space, but which also examines how that pre-existing cultural space has impacts the musical vocabulary, the ability to make music, and the appreciation of, knowledge of and interactions with, various musical codes and symbols to make music, which in turn serves to reflect (in a sense, shape) the cultural space in which it is made. In short, then, this work asserts that popular music’s both reflects and produces identities simultaneously.

This dialogical model of popular music and identity construction is influenced by the work of Jacques Attali, who writes that “every code of music is rooted in the ideologies and technologies of its age, and at the same time produces them” (Attali, 1985:19). Music responds to the cultural space in which it is made, the identities associated with it form from the pre-existing understandings of cultural symbols, codes and ways of being. And yet through new iterations, new networks of cultural, musical, social connections are drawn,

and thus new identities can be formed, which serve to produce new codes and identities which change the cultural space in which successive musics will be produced.

Reflecting and Producing 'Space'

Particularly in ethnographic writing on music and identity, there tends to be a focus on specific and particular *places* in accounts of identity construction through or within musical practices (cf. Martin (2013) on South Africa and politics, Wong (2012) on Ecuador and migration, Olsen (2000) on South American Japanese diaspora, Hebdige (1990) on Caribbean music, de Jong (2006) on Cuban and Curaçaoan musical identity). As will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter Two of this work, place is an integral, problematic and equally vast, component in the intertwined topics of music and identity. The three enter a complex 'trialectic' (to borrow Edward Soja's term, 1996); each malleable concept is impacted by, and impacts upon, the others.

The importance of music to place, and of place to music, with identity a mediating force, is a key theme of this dissertation. However, the 'flow' of influence – from place to music, or from music to place – is discussed in very different terms by influential texts upon this work. John Connell and Chris Gibson, for example, discuss the prevalence in the field of ethnomusicology to focus on geographically (and thus culturally) isolated forms of music making, prevalent in discussions of various 'traditional' musical practices:

Central to the ethnomusicological tradition is a sense of endogeny – of musical expressions emanating from within relatively unique social landscapes, rather than interacting with outside flows, consuming and reproducing the products of others, or mimicking international sounds. At its most basic, ethnomusicology's concern with the endogenous relies on the 'traditional' as the subject of study (Connell and Gibson, 2003:20)

In this account of ethnomusicology's appreciation of identity and place as expressed through music, is a sense of places acting as self-contained entities which are somehow responsible for constructing the musical output that emanates uniquely from those places. Place, in this conception, becomes a 'birth place' (again, a term discussed in more depth in Chapter Two of this dissertation) from which musics are created, and to which musics owe their unique aesthetic.

This ethnomusicological view is countered by Martin Stokes, who suggests that music "provide[s] the means by which the hierarchies of place are negotiated and transformed... Music does not then simply provide a marker in a prestructured social space, but the means by which this space can be transformed" (1994:4). In Stokes' view, conceptions, demarcations and identities attached to, place are governed by musical creation. It is music

that constructs space, rather than reflecting it in a ‘traditional’ endogenous manner. It is a concept that Andy Bennett concurs with, stating that music:

plays a significant part in the way that individuals author space, musical texts being creatively combined with local knowledge and sensibilities in ways that tell particular stories about the local, and impose collectively defined meanings and significances on space (Bennett, in Whiteley et al. 2004:3).

However, Bennett’s work allows for more of a reciprocal moulding between these elements of place, music and identity. The ‘stories’ being told rely on place for context and comprehension; place and the socio-cultural contexts within them, makes sense of the exogenous musical and cultural texts that bleed into always-porous places. Music constructs place as place is defined by music. Bennett also adds an important point to the above, writing that “such authorings of space produce not one, but a series of competing local narratives” (ibid.). Such a realisation is crucial, particularly when discussing a contested genre within the Cuban soundscape such as punk, and particularly when discussing a punk group who are subverting so many of the cultural symbols of Cuban identity, claiming them as something new, and attempting to reflect a sense of national identity through their music.

Transculturation

It seems appropriate to conclude this short literature review with the work of the Cuban ethnomusicologist Fernando Ortiz. Ortiz recognised the power of popular musics to both reflect and shape a malleable and changeable perception of Cuban identity. He coined the term ‘transculturation’, espousing the process as integral to the understanding of Cuban identity:

The real history of Cuba is the history of its intermeshed transculturations... cultures of the most varying origins arrived, either in sporadic waves or in a continuous flow, always exerting an influence and being influenced in turn ([1947] 1995:98)

The process describes a kind of constantly-evolving, constantly changing, maelstrom of identity, where the whole (the concept of Cubanness) is persistently and consistently being moulded by successive waves of influence from without, and in which these newly added constituent parts are, in turn, impacted and shaped by, their relationship to the whole.

Ortiz saw this process as particularly apposite for describing the formation and fermentation of Cuban cultural identity, writing that “Cuba, whose history, more than that of any other country of America, is an intense, complex, unbroken process of transculturation of human groups, all in a state of transition. The concept of transculturation is fundamental and indispensable for an understanding of the history of Cuba” (1995:103). Ortiz’s neologism was designed to contest the idea of acculturation,

which he saw as describing a process of cultured being subsumed. Transculturation, as Ortiz writes, requires a process of loss and a process of new construction in the creation of something different:

The word *transculturation* better expresses the different phases of the process of transition from one culture to another because this does not consist merely in acquiring another culture, which is what the English word *acculturation* really implies, but the process also necessarily involves the loss or uprooting of a previous culture, which could be defined as deculturation. In addition it carries the idea of the consequent creation of a new cultural phenomena, which could be called neoculturation (1995:102-3).

The term might be particularly apposite for addressing the aesthetic of punk within Cuba, indeed for addressing Porno Para Ricardo's insistence on the integration of a punk aesthetic into a wider Cuban cultural context. Punk's arrival to Cuba, the influence it has exerted on the Cuban soundscape, and the influences it has picked up from Cuba that have transformed it and made into a music/aesthetic capable of expressing something uniquely Cuban, is then just one representation of something of a non-corporeal process of 'transculturation'. No wave or steady stream of migrants physically brought punk to Cuba, as in the processes that Ortiz outlines, but nevertheless, punk music – along with myriad other genres of rock music, as discussed below – has indeed seeped into the island. These meandering rivulets of cultural input have served to impact the perception, reception and conception of what is meant by crucially important phrases such as 'Cuban music', 'Cuban culture' and 'Cuban identity'. But it has equally impacted what is meant by terms such as 'punk' within Cuba. As Bronislaw Malinowski, writing on the use of Ortiz's term, notes of transculturation:

The result of every union of cultures is similar to that of the reproductive process between individuals: the offspring always has something of both parents but is always different from each of them. (1995:103)

The union between an imported punk aesthetic and a sense of the Cuban everyday cultural identity might be said to follow Ortiz's above description of a transculturated offspring, borrowing from both 'parent' cultures, but different from both. In Porno Para Ricardo's work, senses of a punk aesthetic and senses of a Cuban aesthetic are both pulled apart. Both are uprooted, have elements stripped away; both are submitted to a process of 'deculturation', to continue to use Ortiz's terminology. But both are added to, both examined and augmented.

Rock Music in Cuba and the ‘Obsession with Identity’: A Contextual Overview

In Cuba, popular music is held in high regard as a paragon of Cuban identity. Genres are as varied as they are well-loved; innovation accompanies tradition in the progression and remembrance of a Cuban soundscape. Yet one constellation of interconnected subgenres has, since the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959, endured something of a complex and convoluted struggle to stake a claim in this Cuban soundscape: rock music. Although a sense of ‘borrowing’ from external musical sources has long been a trait of numerous Cuban genres and musicians, and the roots and routes of Cuban musical expression show cultural dialogues between often diverse sources, there is still often a call to define the ‘authentically Cuban’ as uniquely isolated, autochthonous, and vehemently ‘made in Cuba’. This trait dovetails particularly with the Revolution’s pursuit of defining a sense of national identity as a holistic and singular state, crucially defined from ‘within’ and capable of defining everything, and everyone, Cuban. Thus conceptions of Cuban music as ‘traditional’ and as representing an ‘authentic’ Cubanness still abound in much discourse on Cuban music.

The processes that have brought rock music, in its various and variegated guises, to Cuba throughout the revolutionary period, and the means of borrowing to speak to a sense of Cuban identity, share many similarities with other Cuban musical expressions⁵. However, where more contemporary genres such as hip hop have gained *limited* acceptance as a voice ‘within the Revolution’ (Baker, 2011:33), rock music has been consistently considered something of a threat to the authenticity of the Cuban soundscape, and has often been denied a legitimacy as part of that soundscape, pushed to a position ‘outside the Revolution’. Despite (or perhaps because of) this enforced liminality that rock musics have had to endure within Cuba, many Cuban rock musicians and fans have been as ‘obsessively’ concerned with the project of defining a Cuban identity as any other cultural/ artistic

⁵ This notion of ‘obsession’ with Cuban identity is perhaps visible in almost all genres of music played in Cuba, from its more ‘traditional’ genres (Moore, 2003), to more contemporary twists such as timba (Perna, 2005) and imported styles such as hip hop (Baker, 2011). Unpicking the twists, contradictions and similarities in expressing a sense of Cubanness between and among these myriad musical expressions falls outside the purview of this dissertation, but it is important to bear in mind that many of the assertions made for rock music here – that it maintains a liminal position despite its desire to define a sense of Cubanness – can be made for a number of other genres and musicians throughout Cuba’s post-revolutionary period. Notable, but by no means exhaustive, examples might include the doo-wop-style close harmonies, mixed with numerous Cuban (and other Latin American styles) of the 1960s group ‘Los Zafiros’, the fascinating play with less well known Cuban traditions that singer-songwriter Pedro Luis Ferrer has made part of his work since the 1970s, the progressive rock/bolero group ‘5U4’ from the 1980s, ‘Síntesis’, who have combined prog. rock with Yoruba-language, Afro-Cuban rhythms and santería for some forty years, Rastafarian rapper Escuadrón Patriota, and many of the bands (such as heavy metal band ‘Escape’ and rap-rock group ‘QVA Libre’ to name but two) who feature in the 2009 documentary ‘Cuba Rebelión’ asserting ‘their’ Cubanness.

practitioners. This obsession with defining a sense of Cubanness is one of the aspects that connect rock to other Cuban cultural practices.

Although a full history of the routes and meanings of rock music in Cuba would require a much longer and more discrete analysis, it will perhaps suffice here to suggest that rock music has been a consistent visitor to the Cuban soundworld, albeit one that has at various points in history been criminalised, marginalised, subjugated, rallied against, denied, and co-opted (Humberto Mandulay López, 1997, Peter Manuel 1989, Deborah Pacini Hernandez et al. 2004, Arsenio Rodriguez Quinta, 2001, Robin Moore, 2006). And throughout that tangled and often illicit history – one that dovetails interestingly with the Revolution itself, temporally at least, however antithetical they may appear – much of its relocated meaning has come from its use in helping to define and shape a definition of Cuban identity for its listeners.

This part of the introduction examines some of the moments where rock music has sought a place *as a music reflecting a sense of Cuban identity*. As many writers on different aspects of Cuban culture, politics and history have noted, one central thread that can be seen to run through the skein of otherwise fractious discourses is the central concern with defining Cuban identity. As Antoni Kapcia writes “one dominant, and overwhelming, feature of Cuban political culture [is] the obsession with identity, which dominates politics and dissidence from late in the colonial period until the present day” (2000:24). Arturo Arango similarly suggests that “even for those who... continue to be bitterly opposed to the Revolution, whatever is Cuban remains a near pathological obsession” (1997:123). This ‘obsession’ with national identity is as apparent in rock music as it is within more overtly Cuban forms of cultural practice.

In the pre-Revolution Cuba of the mid-1950s, rock music was perhaps as present and popular as in the rest of Latin America. Cuban musicians would incorporate rock and roll, doo-wop, jazz and other genres with the staples of Cuban tradition as constituent atoms in a constantly evolving Cuban soundscape⁶. However, the early 1960s saw another fervent period of nation-definition as the Revolution began to fully assert itself. Fidel Castro’s infamous maxim “within the Revolution; everything, against it; nothing” (1961) stands testament to the desire to adopt a definition of Cuban national identity as somehow self-contained, all-encompassing, autochthonous and unwilling to allow permeation from exterior cultural sources. The result was both a rigidification of the cultural tropes of

⁶ Again, the band ‘*Los Zafiros*’, with their blend of doo-wop, rock n roll, bolero, and other Latin-American rhythms would be a good example. Mandulay López’s work (1997) provides a comprehensive list of Cuban rock bands through the ages.

traditional genres, and a denial of sources and influences from without as somehow illegitimate and unnecessary for reflecting Cubanness⁷.

And so, as rock music globally was at its most popular and pertinent throughout the 1960s, it was a source strangled, though never entirely absent, within Cuba. Robin Moore writes that “the government for many years defined ‘foreign’ primarily as North American or British and kept music from both these countries out of the media” (2006:13). As many Cubans are keen to point out⁸ this was a period where even owning a Beatles record was a criminal offence, where rock music was excluded from the narrative of Cubanness, where it was censored and subjugated to a ‘non-position’ outside the Revolution. At the same time, the virtues and complexities of a selective sample of Cuba’s wealth of traditional musics (particularly their ‘African’ roots) were extolled as representational of a holistic Cuban identity (Fernandes, 2003), one that has often taken the concept of ‘Africanness’ as an intrinsic (and holistic) aspect of the ‘root’ of Cuban identity (Astley, 2012:11). However, as Vincenzo Perna notes in his study on *timba* music, the place of Africa within this conception of holistic Cuban identity is often a selective one:

Musicologists tend to define as *música afrocubana* folkloric forms of African derivation such as the music of *santería*, *palo monte* and *abakuá*, but not styles with a clear black cultural matrix and audience such as rumba and popular dance musics (2005:7).

This emphasis on *certain* representation of ‘Africa’ within Cuba has operated as much as a “formidable ideological weapon against the United States”, in the words of Alejandro de la Fuente (2001:18), as it has sought an accurate depiction of a contemporary Cuban identity. This trope defining the nation as opposed to that “colossus to the north” (Fernández, 1994:111) is emphasised in Fidel Castro’s polemical words:

We should tell the Yankees that they should not forget... we are an Afro-Latin country... the blood of Africa runs abundantly through our veins. (Castro, 1975, in Pacini Hernandez, 1998:114)

Yet, as Raul A. Fernandez suggests, this opposition to geographical neighbours through cultural/musical tropes didn’t stop only at the U.S. “People of Latin-American origin can be nearly as unfamiliar with Spanish-Caribbean music as US-Anglo audiences... The *clave* beat, the rhythmic use of ‘melody’ instruments, and a melodic approach to percussion

⁷ A telling example of this purge of foreign musical sources can be seen in the animated film ‘Chico and Rita’ (2010) in which the protagonist Chico (based loosely on Cuban jazz pianist Bebo Valdés) has his jazz band concerts cancelled; the music they play is suddenly considered the “enemy’s music”. This strict dichotomy is further problematised by the film as, later, when the protagonists visit New York, they meet with the real-life Latin Jazz innovator, Cuban percussionist Chano Pozo. His appearance in the film asserts the Cuban influence in this music.

⁸ One Cuban in particular would be Gorki Águila, who voices the hypocrisy of the government’s position on The Beatles music in the documentary ‘Cuba Rebelión’ (2009). Similarly, the avatar actor in the film ‘Habana Blues’ (2005) makes the same assertion before their staged band practice scene.

produce exotic sounds even for many Latin Americans” (Fernandez, 1994:111). This assertion makes Cuban music, and thus the identity so inextricable linked to/defined by it, vehemently autochthonous to the point of being ‘exotic’ and ‘confusing’ to any and all surrounding cultural practices. Thus the trope of Cuba as an isolated island – culturally and politically – is cemented through the perceived uniqueness of its music, and is a significant part of the definition of Cubanness still.

Though the Revolution may have rejected rock music, its potent lure scarcely diminished, even if the channels of musical dissemination were narrowed. Rock music in the half-decade of governmental omnipotence *el quinquenio gris* (1971-6) may have been denied a space on Cuban media. Owning, importing and selling foreign records may have been illegal, but the many non-official routes of musical dissemination – smuggled records, static-filled radio signals from Miami or Latin America, third-generation mixtapes, etc – that ingenious Cubans adopted not only led to a persistent trickle of rock music into the island, akin to “smoke seeping under a door” in Deborah Pacini Hernandez and Reebee Garofalo’s evocative words (2004:44), but may also have helped the shaping of a distinctly *Cuban* significance and a translated Cuban meaning to these otherwise ‘foreign’ imports.

Again, the compromised routes of musical dissemination and the meanings that they imbued rock music with would require a longer and more focussed study, but the “fragmentary, intermittent, and highly decontextualised” (Pacini Hernandez and Garofalo, 1999:19) nature of rock music in Cuba resulting from these illicit routes of dissemination may have served to *increase* the significance and ability to reflect a particularly *Cuban* identity for a Cuban audience, rather than diminish it. Accounts of rockers crowding around radios playing *música en inglés*,⁹ avoiding police harassment to speculate on the meanings of English lyrics evoke a music where little additional information accompanied the music on this illicit and fragmentary passage across the waves and into Cuban ears. And so speculation as to meaning, and lyrical as well as cultural translation, became essential parts of decoding the messages of this imported music. Rock music could be made to fit with a contemporary context; translated to mean something Cuban, and because the same dearth of information that led to the speculation in the first place meant that there was little means of verification – that is, there was no way to be proven wrong in one’s interpretation of the texts - rock music was allowed to mean, in a sense, whatever its clandestine audience wanted it to

⁹ Importantly, it seems that distinctions between American- and British-made rock musics and Latin American rock sung in English were not always present in Cuban appreciations of rock music.

mean, and thus its position as a tool for describing an alternative sense of Cubanness was affirmed.

If the solidification of Revolutionary identity in the early 60s serves as one bookend to the repression of rock music in Cuba, then it is tempting to see the Special Period – that is the interrelated social and economic crises following the collapse of the Soviet Union – as another. Although, as Robin Moore points out, governmental attitudes to rock music may have begun to soften in the late 1970s as the idea that “the support of traditional music to the exclusion of other genres may be as detrimental to the country as the loss of its own folklore” (Hernández, 2002:73, in Moore, 2006:13) began to be accepted, post-Special Period Cuba saw a mushrooming in popularity and, crucially, *visibility* of a great number of broadly alternative, broadly imported, musical expressions that audiences and musicians did not feel necessarily had to be synthesised with more recognisably Cuban sounds to be “Cubanized” (ibid.). Heavy metal, hip-hop, black metal and punk began to find more of a place within a Cuban musical narrative as distinct genres.

The huge influx of tourist to the island in the early 90s (Perez 2006:309), something of a governmental concession to the desperate economic situation, paradoxically helped to both cement the image of the ‘traditional’ Cuban musical/identity model whilst simultaneously helping to broaden the picture, and fill in the informational blanks, of imported rock music (Astley, 2012:33). As traditional Cuban musics once more made a significant cultural impact globally, rock musics – particularly as brought by ‘cultural tourists’ visiting universities etc - began to permeate more into a Cuban sense of identity, and the myriad genres began to arrive to the island in much more readily intelligible and less fragmentary forms. As Pacini Hernandez and Garofalo again attest, by the mid-2000s the increased routes of rock dissemination led to a more coherent recognition of subgenre distinctions, and thus the formation of “dozens, if not hundreds, of rock groups in Cuba, playing every imaginable sub-genre of rock, from grunge to death metal, to punk, each with a devoted fanbase” (Pacini Hernandez and Garofalo, 2004:65).

However, these subcultural generic distinctions have been often overlooked by fans and officialdom alike, resulting in the umbrella term *‘frike’* as a description of *all* Cuban rock musicians, fans and subcultures, irrespective of their bespoke and specific musical affiliations. This agglomeration serves to problematise some of the well-rehearsed and well-defined temporal, geographical and sonic lines between rock music’s many subgenres that make sense of, and provide a narrative to, rock music in a British and/or American context. Though distinctions between the more nuanced subgenres of rock – ‘thrash

metal', 'black metal' etc, even terms as evocative and 'fixed' as 'punk' - are of some importance within Cuba, they are at least made a little more hazy by the lack of free-flowing and complete musical dissemination within and to the island following the embargo of the 1960s, and are blurred by the incomplete, and often temporally confused, map of British/American bands that makes its way to Cuba, and this problematises subgenre definitions as used within this dissertation (or more broadly to talk about Cuban rock music).

As both Ciro Díaz and Gorki Águila of Porno Para Ricardo note, the musical map of rock music, for many Cubans, is a little sketchy. Gorki suggests that "there were people from extreme metal that didn't like punk so much, in spite of the fact that extreme metal came out of punk, but people here don't know anything" (Gorki, interview with author, 2010).

On remembering his early musical influences, Ciro says:

I listened to anything. Maybe it happened to me as it happened to many people here, because technology came so delayed, there were no tape recorders, not even radios sometimes, and what came through the radio was very filtered music. For example, punk came to Cuba very late. At the end of the 70s, no one listened to it here, so we had it at the end of the 80s, beginning of the 90s (Ciro Díaz, interview with author, 2010).

Further, the necessity to translate genres to make sense of a Cuban cultural setting has led to the incorporation of many musical aspects – and not always Cuban – into rock genres. In Cuba, this has not led to an increasingly fragmented spectrum of 'hybrid' sub-genres, but to a blurring of the boundaries between musical categories that make sense of rock music *elsewhere*. And so the *friki* identity as a variegated mixture and blurring of many distinct subcultural styles has become if not always a welcome, then certainly a recognisably Cuban, archetype.

Yet to suggest that rock music has eventually 'won' this revolutionary battle for acceptance *as Cuban within Cuba* because of its (relative) ease of dissemination and (relatively) intact cultural image would be to gloss over the on-going struggle for 'authenticity' as a legitimate voice for expressing contemporary Cuban life. Indeed, the very completeness of the paramusical image associated with the music that now makes its way into Cuba has, to many rock musicians (and Porno Para Ricardo would serve as a particularly vehement example of this), *diminished* its potential to reflect a sense of Cubanness. Where little cultural (or literal) translation of style and meaning need take place in these less-than-fragmentary musics, a growing sense of imitating foreign musical and stylistic tropes has, to many, pervaded the burgeoning rock scene within Cuba. Musics are replayed and replicated intact, without the necessity to work their codes into a wider, and more Cuban, fabric. As a result,

it is argued by bands such as Porno Para Ricardo that some of the ‘obsession’ with defining a particularly *Cuban* identity that has been a running thread throughout rock music’s history in Cuba has waned¹⁰.

Y en eso llegó... Porno Para Ricardo

The following late-afternoon, we sat drinking coffee on Gorki’s balcony; the setting sanguine sun still playing fiercely on the potholed pavement below. Taking a sip, Gorki leaned out over the balcony and smiled at the vista below. Turning to me, he said “see those two men in suits sitting in the park; the one reading the newspaper and the one standing by the road? They’re police. They follow me everywhere since I got back to Cuba.” He wasn’t angry, and spoke of his omnipresent escort in a matter of fact manner. It was a part of his daily routine now; one more sign of the oppression that has hung heavily around him in the eleven years of fronting punk band Porno Para Ricardo. One of the besuited men glanced up from his paper at the balcony. Even at this distance, I could see a facial expression that invited paranoia. Gorki drained his small coffee cup and said “let’s go inside to do the interview.”

Inside the flat was sparsely furnished¹¹. Dusty yellow coloured walls lit the room with irradiating warmth. Skirting the wall in a bundle were long wooden beams, coarse and brimming with splinters. These timbers were being collected for the refurbishment of the band’s home recording studio/ rehearsal space. In the centre of the room the rocking chair ubiquitous in Cuban houses: Gorki’s chair. To the back of the room a discarded shard of mirror, still held in ornate wooden frame, and a work bench swamped with wires – some coloured plastic, some bare copper - the innards of a Fender Jaguar guitar, itself daubed in paint and stickers, and a Cuban three peso note – with the defiant face of Che Guevara in revolutionary red emblazoned upon it – sellotaped above the pickups.

¹⁰ Again, this is not to suggest that Porno Para Ricardo are the only band who, in this Post-Special Period moment of rock music’s popularity, are making some sort of ‘Cubanised’ rock music. There are several important bands who continue to meld rock genres with Cuban sounds, sources and symbols to great and varying effects. ‘Habana Abierta’ (or in their earlier, Havana-based guise as ‘Habana Oculta’) meld rock with the Cuban genre of *son*. Numerous bands (QVA Libre) meld rock with rap, numerous bands have added rock to Afro-Cuban rhythms. The above assertion is a reflection of what Porno Para Ricardo see as a trend, particularly evident in the genres of metal (see Chapters Three and Four), of imitating culture without speaking directly to a sense of Cubanness.

¹¹ See Appendix for photographs.

Along the narrow corridor in near total darkness, the kitchen had an assortment of disparate and well-worn pots, with pride of place atop the old Soviet cooker given to two further ubiquitous symbols of Cuban domesticity: the pressure cooker and the cafeteria. Walking easily through the gloom, Gorki refilled his small coffee cup.

Further down the corridor, a narrow wooden door daubed in red and yellow paint. The hammer and sickle made phallic; the infamous logo of Porno Para Ricardo; the entrance to the recording studio¹². But I can't go in. It's a gutted shell at the moment. Gorki is waiting for a delivery of soundproofing foam for the renovation.

I took a seat on the threadbare leather sofa, spilling its yellow and pink foam guts out of its cushions and we talked hesitatingly, but passionately, about a Cuban prog. rock/bolero band from the 70s; '5U4'. We talked about our favourite types of guitar, agreeing upon the Fender Jaguar, and we talked about our favourite punk bands.

* * *

It was in the post-Special Period, pre-millennial moment – a gap between the slabs of Cuban history - that Porno Para Ricardo were¹³ formed. Gorki Luis Águila Carrasco¹⁴ grew up with the ubiquitous sound of boleros emanating from the family radio, coupled with the more clandestine absorption of British rock groups on officially forbidden, yet always somehow available, vinyl. Though he did not enter into the professionalised musical route

¹² Again, see appendix for photographs.

¹³ Although grammatically incorrect, I find it necessary to discuss 'the band' in plural, rather than singular, terms. I intend to use the terms 'the band' and 'Porno Para Ricardo' herein as short hand for 'the members of the band' or 'the members of Porno Para Ricardo' and to refer to the actions/ opinion of the *members of the band*. The reason for this is to incorporate all four members of the band into the analyses, and to imbue the discourse with a feeling of plurality and individuality within a group; themes central to the discussions within this work. This is particularly important when discussing Porno Para Ricardo as, in the overt politicisation of the band, and the censorship and imprisonment visited upon Gorki specifically, Gorki appears, in many sources, to have been singled out as the band incarnate. This can be seen in interviews 'with the band' – particularly the interview cited throughout this work as MLC, 2008 - which patently only include the voice of Gorki, yet is labelled as the voice of 'Porno Para Ricardo'. Thus there is a danger in using the third person singular to discuss the band of making 'Gorki' and 'Porno Para Ricardo' synonymous. In using the plural, I endeavour to allude to the plurality of voices that is essential to the band's work, particularly incorporating guitarist Ciro Diaz, who I believe to be instrumental in the band's *musical* as well as political ethos.

¹⁴ The following, though not direct quotes, details Gorki's own words in an interview that will be heavily cited throughout the work, and can be found in full here: <http://acubanaleph.blogspot.co.uk/2011/11/interview-with-gorki-aguila-and-ciro.html>.

common to many popular musicians, teaching himself guitar, he would attend numerous rock concerts, and the genres formed an integral aspect of his own identity.

Lead guitarist, co-songwriter and occasional lead singer Ciro Javier Díaz Penedo similarly brought an eclectic mix of musical influences to bear on the band. He absorbed any and all music making its way through the 'filter' of official media channels, though never really professed an overt affiliation to any specific genre. As with Gorki, it was the presence of these covert means of musical dissemination – as much as the musics they transported – that he responded to, finding something of a sense of shared identity in the illicit cassettes of rock band brought into school by friends. Metallica, Guns N' Roses – the bastions of late-heavy metal, the goliaths of the 1980s (arriving slightly later to Cuba, perhaps) – spearheaded the surge in both popularity and visibility of rock music's myriad subgenres that typifies Special Period youth culture in Cuba.

However, it was with some frustration and chagrin that Gorki and Ciro would hear the practiced mimicry of Cuba's heavy rock performers. The guttural bellows, the English-language lyrics, the cultural signs adopted wholesale, though presumably stemming from the same clandestine sources important to Gorki and Ciro, seemed to ring false. This new breed of Cuban '*frike*' was loud, but appeared, to Gorki at least, to be saying very little. In 1999, as the inertia of the Special Period tailed off, and as tourists flocked to Cuba in record numbers (cf. Perez, 2006:309 and Gott, 2004:290), and as the various rock subcultures increased in popularity (and notoriety to officialdom), Gorki endeavoured to form his own band. From the very outset, Porno Para Ricardo established not only a clear aesthetic, but a definite socio-political stance. Their creative identity embraced an amateurism (in the most positive sense of the word) and was fiercely protective of their musical output, opting to 'do it themselves' in almost every capacity, from performance, to artwork, production to distribution, to designing and making their own t-shirts¹⁵.

Though it would be tempting to define the band as simply 'anti-Castro', or perhaps more broadly as 'anti-establishment', running that well-ploughed furrow of punk identity globally, and certainly both these epithets have their place within the band's ethos, at their essence, Porno Para Ricardo are not a band that exclusively rail against hegemony irrespectively. Rather, they are a band determined to paint as realistic a portrayal of *their*

¹⁵ As one example of their vehement self-containment, the bands website (www.pornopararicardo.org) is severely critical of a Mexican record label that released a compilation of the band's work (mostly from the band's first album). The website criticises the fact that the band were not consulted over track order, selection or artwork. Examples of Porno Para Ricardo's home-made, stencilled artwork and t-shirts can be found in the appendix.

everyday experience from within Cuban society (albeit ‘outside the Revolution’) as possible; a portrait that is forthright, honest, critical and passionate. Porno Para Ricardo have, and have always had, a message, and they have been adamant from the beginning that they would not compromise in delivering their message. But at its most significant, this sonic portrait of the everyday - via cultural links, via cultural remembrances and a bespoke local vernacular (lyrical and cultural) - serves to establish connections between members of the band’s generation; between Cubans. It is from this foundation as part of the fabric of contemporary Cuban culture that Porno Para Ricardo are afforded the legitimacy to speak of the issues and concerns in Cuban society, to voice their frustrations with (rather than just a simple, reactionary rejection of) the political hegemony, and to assert as their *raison d’être* to say what others are thinking¹⁶. The result is a controversial punk band. The result is Porno Para Ricardo.

The infamy as political dissidents, or as champions of free speech depending on which side of the long-established political dichotomy one positions oneself, has not always encircled the band so tightly. In their nascent days, though still irreverent and controversial, the band appear to have carved something of a small, and always precarious, niche for themselves within Cuban music. Their first album (*Rock Para Las Masas... Cárnicas*¹⁷) garnered some limited exposure in the Cuban media. The band performed on the alternative music show ‘*Cuerda Viva*’ in 2002, in typically irreverent fashion; Gorki miming a guitar solo on a computer keyboard, and performing a studied impersonation of Cuban musical great Silvio Rodríguez, replete with sunglasses and hand-over-one-ear singing style¹⁸. The band played live at numerous venues across the country; indeed revelled in their live performances, which were anarchic¹⁹ yet jovial, unprecedented within Cuba, yet inflected with countless symbols that pertained to a Cuban sensibility. Gorki would tell jokes about the island’s baseball teams, would wear schoolgirl uniforms, would blow up condoms as balloons, smash Soviet guitars, play ‘*The Internationale*’, the band would sell their cassettes and throw the money that they had made out into the audience, they would burn Metallica t-shirts. There was a communication between the audience and the band that was fundamental to the live performances, and the language – literally and symbolically – though couched in

¹⁶ Again this assertion is taken from an interview (MLC, 2008).

¹⁷ The title of this record is somewhat difficult to translate, owing to the double meaning of the word ‘*masas*’ – ‘masses’ and ‘meat’ in English. Thus the album title is something like ‘Rock for the Masses/Meat... Carnivores’

¹⁸ The band’s performances can be found here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W4Uk5gsHlas>

¹⁹ An example of one such gig, in which Gorki, dressed in schoolgirl uniform, destroys a Soviet guitar can be found here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sJ1SDbVdGnc>

punk discourse familiar to both the 'Sex Pistols' and 'Reagan Youth' of Britain and the U.S. respectively, was distinctly *Cuban*.

Lyrically and thematically, Porno Para Ricardo's early work was more juvenile than radical; more puerile than political. Songs discussed lesbian fantasies²⁰ and sex²¹, as well as more light-hearted profanity and anarchic in-jokes. So in this burgeoning period, Porno Para Ricardo may have been just one more of the growing number of rock bands in Havana; more outspoken than many perhaps, more deliberately amateur than most, less influential than some, but able to work, if not within the system, then alongside it perhaps.

However, the band's history contains within it something of its own 'event'; a trauma that produced a sea change in the band's outlook, demonstrating to them first-hand the ferociousness of censorship. In 2003 Porno Para Ricardo played at a rock festival in the island's most Westerly province, Pinar del Rio. Following their performance, Gorki claims to have been approached by a woman insisting on buying drugs from him. The exact details of the encounter are still contested, but Gorki's own account²² concedes the presence of amphetamine tablets (albeit a small quantity) but asserts entrapment, claiming the buyer was a government worker in *friki* clothes, and suggests more political motives for the arrest. After a lengthy incarceration and a hurried trial, Gorki was convicted of drug possession and intent to supply - a charge that, to this day, he vehemently denies and which he asserts was a deliberate case of police entrapment due to heavy-handed governmental attempts to censor an increasingly popular counterculture figure (Maza, 2010) - and was sentenced to four years in jail. The claim of entrapment and political censorship is lent credence by the events surrounding Gorki's arrest. 'La Primavera Negra' ('The Black Spring'²³) of 2003, saw the government 'crack down' upon social critics in numerous professions, arresting 75 writers, artists, poets, musicians and politicians who had voiced an opposition to the revolutionary government²⁴. As part of the same drive, locations deemed supportive of any such counter-cultural movements were closed, most importantly for this dissertation the much-loved 'Patio del María'; a venue for live rock music (at which Porno Para Ricardo would play) closed ostensible because of drug trafficking, but regarded by

²⁰ The song 'Marlén Y Tatiana'.

²¹ As in songs such as 'Semen y Castigo' ('Semen and Punishment') and 'Felación' ('Fellatio'), which appears in the film 'Habana Blues' (2009).

²² Gorki speaks candidly about his arrest and time in prison in the documentary Cuba Rebelión (2009), and a number of articles concerning his arrest and further harassment at the hands of the authorities, albeit from a partisan perspective, can be found here: <http://www.freemuse.org/sw1534.asp>

²³ A brief outline of the Black Spring, including the names of those arrested, can be found here: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Spring_\(Cuba\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Spring_(Cuba)). Although Gorki's name does not appear alongside those arrested as part of this campaign, his arrest coincided with those listed here.

²⁴ This figures of 75 arrests is taken from the freemuse website <http://www.freemuse.org/sw3956.asp>, but is largely corroborated by other sources.

many of its erstwhile denizens as a politically motivated operation²⁵. After serving time in a maximum security under desperate conditions²⁶, denied family visits and kept in the company of murderers (Gorki's own words, in *Cuba Rebelión*, 2008), Gorki was transferred to a minimum security facility where he helped organise a bolero band²⁷. He was released in 2005, having served two years of his sentence.

Yet on release from prison, Gorki found that the punishment visited upon him was far from over. The band were stripped of their membership to the '*Asociación Hermanos Saiz*' (AHS²⁸), the government-funded agency (effectively a musician's union) to which one must belong to be afforded a legitimacy as a musician, to gain access to rehearsal space and to be permitted to play concerts within Cuba (García-Freyre, 2008:556a). The band's ejection from the AHS effectively banned them from all live performance, both directly in Cuba, and indirectly outside of Cuba through visa restrictions. Since this prohibition, the band have clandestinely attempted to stage gigs themselves, working almost with a 'flash mob' mentality, handing out home-made flyers around *friki* hot spots hours before a show. Invariably, these events are shut down by the authorities. The enforced hiatus served not only to diminish the notoriety the band had garnered within Cuba's media, but effectively denied them the title of musicians. Their albums are unavailable for purchase within Cuba, and it goes almost without saying that their music now receives absolutely no airplay on any of Cuba's media outlets²⁹. The band, particularly Gorki, endure constant harassment and monitoring from the authorities. This makes even the most mundane bending of stringent regulations (a *de rigueur* part of the Cuban everyday) an unnecessary chore. The band have existed for most of their career in the hinterland of Cuba's music scene and, tarnished with the black mark of being 'dissidents', they have been similarly marginalised within Cuban society.

Once more, it is important to point out here that this description of recrimination, persecution and censorship, though pernicious, is by no means commonplace for most Cuban musicians, even those operating within niche, 'alternative' genres, even for those

²⁵ A more detailed description of this club, Porno Para Ricardo's affinity to it, and its place within a contemporary Cuban identity, is discussed in Chapter Two of this work.

²⁶ Gorki provides a poignant and powerfully recollected image of the conditions in the maximum security prison in 'Cuba Rebelión' (2009).

²⁷ Examples of Gorki's handmade posters for this group can be found in the appendix.

²⁸ The band's contestation with the agency is discussed in chapters four and five.

²⁹ Although this blanket-ban on media airplay is undoubtedly politically-motivated, Geoffrey Baker's article "Cuba Rebelión: Underground Music in Havana" (2011) makes the salient point that such media support is often denied to 'underground artists' in numerous other countries, irrespective of politics. Further, as there is, in Baker's view, "virtually no market for original CDs in Cuba" (2011:22), an assertion similarly made by Stephen Foehr (2001:26), and radio play is "barely relevant to underground scenes" (2011:6), these impositions cannot be necessarily seen as unduly harsh punishments particular to Porno Para Ricardo.

writing thinly-veiled critiques of the revolutionary regime. As Geoffrey Baker writes, “The high-profile case of Gorki Águila lead some to paint Cuba’s cultural climate as totalitarian, but Gorki’s case is exceptional... no other artists have received that level of repression in recent years” (2011:12). That point in itself leads to a number of interesting questions about what it is exactly about Porno Para Ricardo’s music and lyrics that promote such specific and unusually harsh reprimand, questions which will be alluded to throughout the analysis herein.

But even within the case of this band, opportunities to make music are not entirely removed by the state. The band’s ability to perform their music live to a congregated audience unhindered by political pressure may have been severely compromised by events in Pinar del Rio in 2003. However, their momentum - the desire to continue to make music - was, if anything, increased, and their ability to record their music seems to have been left relatively unaffected. As Baker notes, this is a process that seems fairly typical of the Cuban authorities approach to potentially problematic music(ians):

Censorship is... rarely blanket or uniform, and it is usually focussed on preventing the most problematic music from reaching the largest live audiences rather than on disrupting artists’ efforts to disseminate their music within their scene (2011:8).

This is not to downplay the effects of this prohibition on live performance within the career of Porno Para Ricardo, given that they were still able to record and disseminate music. Indeed, even given the de facto prohibition on both performance and recording imposed through incarceration, live performance was a significant (perhaps even more than recording) avenue for expressing identity for Porno Para Ricardo in their nascent years. Banning them from playing live, as is discussed in greater depth in Chapter Six and the Conclusion, has severely impacted upon the band’s identity and their ability to disseminate that identity. That said, following this ban on performance, the band seem to have redoubled their efforts to make their voices heard. In a sense, their very personal experience with the inequality of the regime served as a catalyst to the band’s output, crystallising opinions and cementing intra-band solidarities³⁰. The band built a recording studio within Gorki’s apartment from which to make their music, a process that was mirrored by numerous other bands and musicians throughout the 2000s, as home recording studios bloomed, particularly throughout Havana (Baker, 2011:22).

³⁰ It should be noted here that drummer Luis David González and bass player Oscar Pita, left the band during this enforced hiatus, ostensibly to attend university, though this intense political pressure may have played its part.

2006 saw the (self) release of the band's "diptych" albums '*Soy Porno, Soy Popular*' ('I am Porno, I am Popular'³¹) and '*A mí no me gusta la política pero yo le gusta a ella, compañeros*' ('I Don't Like Politics, But She Likes Me'). Though the in-jokes, the (deliberately) anarchic amateurism and the crude, distinctly Cuban, lexicon are still absolutely apparent in these post-imprisonment albums, gone is much of the juvenile outrageousness, to be replaced by aggressive calling-out of the subjects of criticism³² "by name and surname" (Gorki's words, in Petr Placák, 2006), or else a sort of world-weary cynicism that both laughs at, and laments, the state of contemporary Cuban politics, economics and alternative music³³. 2008 saw the release of a much more polished album; '*El Disco Rojo Desteñido*' ('The Faded Red Album') providing a studied and refined kind of argument (as opposed to the rawer aggression of the diptych) which loses none of the impact (or humour) but which defiantly picks its targets for both criticism and ridicule - '*Los Dinosaurios*' ('The Dinosaurs'), '*El General*' ('The General'³⁴) and '*Periodistas Fidelistas*' ('Fidel's Journalists') – but at the same time relaxes into some of the minutiae of Cuban culture, discussing swear words (in the song '*Malas Palabras*'), reclaiming bastions of Cubanness (in a cover of a bolero standard³⁵) or a lament for the smell of lobster ('*El Olor de la Langosta*').

Recent years have seen something of a sporadic existence for the band. Gorki lives in partial exile, partial emigration in Mexico; refused entry to Cuba as often as he is allowed in. 2011 was to see the band perform their first gig outside of Cuba at a summer festival in Prague. However, visa denials to other three members meant that Gorki (able to attend only because he was living in Mexico) was the sole member of the band to perform, though perform he did, ably backed by three Lithuanian 'mantracore' punks³⁶! Though geographical circumstances have conspired against the band of late, coupled with the ever-pervasive political censorship, the band resolutely continue to exist. 2013 (as this dissertation is readied for submission) has seen the release of the band's new full-length album, recorded at the now refurbished '*La Paja Recold*' home studio in Gorki's apartment (discussed in the conclusion to this work). The album opens with another contestable, but nonetheless undeniable, sound of a 'new' Cuban musical identity, giving the punk audience

³¹ This title alludes to the song (and cigarette advertisement) '*Soy Cubano, Soy Popular*'.

³² Examples, discussed in greater depth within, would be '*el Comandante (Coma Andante)*' ('The Commander (Walking Coma)'); a song – one of the band's most infamous – explicitly about Fidel Castro, and '*Comunista Chivato*' ('Communist Snitch') about the head of the AHS Alpidio Alonso.

³³ Many of the songs on these albums explore this territory, but as examples, '*Vámonos pa G*' and '*Don Cr?*' (see Chapters Two and Four respectively) critique Cuba's rock culture, and '*Mi Balsa*' and '*Te Acuerdas de...*' (Chapter One) reference Cuba's political and economic stagnation.

³⁴ A Song about "Castro number two", Raúl.

³⁵ This 'cover' is discussed in chapter four.

³⁶ The band Alaverdi assumed the role of Porno Para Ricardo, at the last minute, to stage the gig. This performance is discussed in the conclusion of this thesis.

a stab of reggaetón imbued with Porno Para Ricardo's strident political directness *'Este año sí se cae'* ('This Year it ["The Dictatorship"] Will Fall'). This latest album makes use of the band's new-found European popularity, offering the album as a digital download from their bandcamp website. In August of 2013, the band played their first gigs outside of Cuba (and their first uninterrupted gigs anywhere in a long time), embarking on a tour of Europe that took them to Prague, Poland, Barcelona and Madrid.

Fragments of an Identity

Despite a wilful campaign to silence the band, they have continued to make noise from the sidelines. Though they may not be well *heard*, they are certainly well *known*, both within Cuba and outside. Perhaps because of the imbalance between the notoriety of the band and the comparative lack of exposure to their music, Porno Para Ricardo have tended to be discussed in political, rather than musical, terms in relationship to their take on Cuba. They have come to occupy a position that accentuates their political side, often to the detriment of their musicality. Thus, they are the "most censored band on the island" (Cuba Rebelión, 2009), "the band most famous for not playing"³⁷ describes as "dissidents" (cf. MLC, 2008, Maza, 2010), "hyper-controversial" (Baker, 2011:34), or a project of "social resistance" (García-Freyre, 2008a:559). Their lyrics openly ridiculing and castigating the anachronisms of the Revolution and calling out those responsible are pored over; the continued police harassment visited upon Gorki is constantly and diligently reported. Gorki is celebrated as a face of in-island rebellion when visiting the US. Yet in all these reports, in all these documents and all these 'fans', the music is often 'left out' of the story³⁸, forgotten in the towering waves of indignation (on both sides of this fifty-year-old political schism) that engulf so much of what is Cuban. This politicising rhetoric is exacerbated further by epithets given to the band by media within the United States. Gorki's name in particular seems always to be preceded by political assertions. 'Anti-Castro' (Robles, 2008a), 'underground', 'dissident', titles that may hold some truth, but which fail to tell the whole story of the complex set of complaint the band address in their work. If their lyrics at times are "profanity-laced" and aimed "against the Castro"³⁹ government" (Robles, 2008b), as they

³⁷ A title the band give themselves in their recent Youtube video requesting fan funding for their 2013 tour to Europe.

³⁸ Gorki himself alluded to this political/musical division, as discussed in the conclusion of this work, when he recounted the story of staging an album signing in Miami.

³⁹ It is perhaps worth an explanatory footnote here concerning the address of Cuba's former president Fidel Castro. Where many Cuban sources seem to prefer the familiar 'Fidel', many U.S. sources stick to the somewhat pejorative-sounding 'Castro'. In direct quotes this work uses the form given in the source material, elsewhere, I stick to the full name 'Fidel Castro'.

certainly are, then there are multiple targets of such profanity which the (politically motivated) championing of the band as simple ‘anti-Castro’ fails to recognise.

Even when the band’s musical output is addressed, it is often in a shorthand, cursory manner. The description as ‘punk rockers’, though readily understandable to a wide audience, only serves to define the band’s musical identity in very narrow terms, and in a sense serves to exclude them from the contemporary and historical framework of so-called ‘autochthonous’ Cuban musical tradition. Not only do Porno Para Ricardo define their soundscape with recourse to aspects of Cuban tradition, they address and incorporate countless and variegated cultural, historical and political signifiers of Cubanness into their repertoire; from reinvented socialist slogans and artwork, to snippets of radio and television jingles, from interpretations of traditional Cuban genres, to studied parodic imitations of official speech-making. While the band’s criticisms of Fidel Castro and the lingering dogmatism, bureaucracy and persecution of the revolutionary government are as overt as they are well documented, much less studied is the band’s penchant for remembrance of childhood and constant commentary on life in Cuba which reveals some warmth, and certainly a deeply profound attachment to, the nation. Though sonically they set themselves up as a punk band, there is a running critique throughout their oeuvre of this generation of Cubans who defined themselves by recourse to US rock music; the so-called *friki* culture, which Gorki has claimed “offered no communication” (Gorki, 2010). Similarly, lying almost ‘beneath the surface’ of a brash and brazen punk soundworld, are the subtle (and not always so) inflections of Cuban tradition; though the band may lambast the political institutions that claim traditional genres as a “banner of patriotism” (Masvidal, 2008), it seems negating the musics themselves comes a little less easily.

This work, aside from anything else, attempts to write the creative practice back into the story of Porno Para Ricardo. The focus of the work, then, gravitates around, and anchors itself within, the musical space of Porno Para Ricardo. Though it is impossible to ignore the extra-musical politicisation of the band – either as a censored pariah within Cuba, or as a championed (if seldom aesthetically appreciated⁴⁰) spark of radical dissidence outside of Cuba – this dissertation will address these binaristic labels specifically as they emerge and are addressed within the band’s musical output. It attempts to demonstrate the multiplicity of the identity they construct for themselves through *music*, and only then does it suggest the ramifications such identity constructions may have politically and socially in addressing the state of contemporary Cubanness. Rather than ‘choosing sides’ in the polemical

⁴⁰ Again, this assertion alludes to Gorki’s perception of his ‘fanbase’ at the CD signing event staged in Miami, discussed in the conclusion of this work.

rhetoric of Cuban politics – a politics that constantly sets up a series of non-traversable and permanently opposed binaries - Porno Para Ricardo exist (deliberately) somewhere between these poles. They are an apposite example of a type of Cuban identity that exists in the cracks between the narrative: anti-hegemonic, yet somehow counter-counterculture; certainly not placed ‘within’ the Revolution, and yet, because of their insistent claim on Cuban identity, not quite willing to stand entirely ‘outside’ it either. In true punk fashion, at every turn they seem to sneer at, contradict and parody conceptions of Cuban identity, whilst at the same time celebrating, claiming and remembering it.

These enforced definitions outline Porno Para Ricardo as something of an ‘Other’; a cavalcade of binary-defying contradictions. Opposed to both the lingering dogmatism, censorship and persecution of the revolutionary government but, crucially, rife with a cynicism towards the *‘frikis’*, who Porno Para Ricardo see as having adopted the pose of rock music, without necessarily ‘understanding it’. The band are deeply confrontational, critical of nationalism, revolutionary rhetoric and inaction among the populace, yet somehow strangely nostalgic and adamant in their right to claim themselves if not as ‘authentic Cuban musicians’ then certainly as ‘authentically Cuban’. They reflect if not ‘pride’ in place then at least a recognition of its importance in their music. Though they play punk, a genre not known for its remembrances of the past (see Pinkus, 1996) they engage in much memory work. In all, the band present a contradictory set of binaries – insisting on positioning themselves often in a liminal space between (or outside) each set. It is the analysis of these contradictions that may help illuminate some of the complexities surrounding individual identity construction of the band members, their smaller ‘subcultural’ network, their identities within Cuban music, and the wider concept of ‘Cubanness’ more generally. In short, this labyrinthine twisting and turning of seemingly contradictory aspects of the band illuminates the fragmentary nature of identity construction. Formed from shards, melded together, but never rigidly, open to change and fluctuation, open to emphasis of a particular strand, it is the connections made – and perceived by the audience - between these often disparate aspects which forms identity; links and connections that can be rediscovered, rerouted, broken or made to run parallel to established connections. This network of connections creates a prism, the view through which depends on the angle one looks at. Porno Para Ricardo’s identity – fragmented, complex and multifaceted – is one such multi-faced prism. The face of ‘anti-Castroism’ having been examined most closely, this work attempts to turn the prism around, delve more deeply into the band’s repertoire to discover at least some of the various dimensions held within.

A Cuban Aleph? A Theoretical Framework

Rather than attempt to demonstrate the veracity of claiming Porno Para Ricardo constitute a 'new Cuban identity', or to illuminate the ways in which they 'fit' into the established hagiography of 'traditional Cubanness' (or indeed to discount such hagiographies) this dissertation seeks to flip perspective. I suggest seeing the band as one potential site of synecdoche *for* Cubanness, that is as a model for dissecting and understanding some of the myriad composite themes of the complex and often contradictory whole. Instead of attempting an understanding of one band through recourse to the social-historical-cultural-geographical (etcetera) matrices that surround them, it may provide an apposite model of analysis to invert this relationship and attempt to say something of this broader framework through the examination of a small constituent part. Rather than see Porno Para Ricardo as a constituent part of Cubanness (or not), this dissertation illuminates the ways in which various aspects of Cubanness are *expressed through* Porno Para Ricardo. If identity constructs a prism, then what may be viewed through that prism?

This dissertation tentatively suggests using Porno Para Ricardo as a '*Cuban Aleph*' following the work of Jorge Luis Borges; "one of the points in space that contain all points" (Borges, 1945:6). Borges further describes his Aleph thus:

What eternity is to time, the Aleph is to space. In eternity, all time – past, present and future – coexists simultaneously. In the Aleph, the sum total of the spatial universe is to be found in a tiny shining sphere barely over an inch across. (Borges, 1971:189)

This theoretical device allows the viewer to examine the whole through a keyhole. Perhaps Porno Para Ricardo can be used as an Aleph for contemporary Cuban identity, culture and society. Perhaps through glancing closely, carefully and specifically at minutiae within their work, one may detect all of Cuban identity, from all angles and in all its fluidity, its malleability and its various definitions.

Of course, in making such an assertion, one needs to remain somewhat grounded. Indeed as 'Borges' (in the guise of the fictionalised protagonist and narrator of the story) notes, description of such an Aleph are doomed to fall short:

... here begins my despair as a writer. All language is a set of symbols whose use among its speakers assumes a shared past. How, then, can I translate into words the limitless Aleph, which my floundering mind can scarcely encompass?... Really, what I want to do is impossible, for any listing of an endless series is doomed to be infinitesimal. In that single gigantic instant I saw millions of acts both delightful and awful; not one of them occupied the same point in space, without overlapping or transparency. What my eyes beheld was simultaneous, but what I shall now write down will be successive, because language is successive. Nonetheless, I'll try to recollect what I can. (Borges, 1945:8)

The veracity of one band being able to encapsulate ‘all that is Cuban’, and the ability of this writer to describe and analyse all such points within that Aleph (even if they may be said to exist at all), are problematic points, and this work is bound to encounter the same problems as Borges outlines above, recounting successively what are simultaneous, overlapping and, on occasions, contradictory, points. But that is not to discount the theory itself. From microethnographic readings of fragments of songs – a lyric, a sound, a shout, a sign – something may be gleaned of the constituent parts of a contemporary national identity, from the minutiae of the ‘everyday’ Cuban experience, to the wider socio-political and historical framework in which the band operate. This work, this assertion of a Cuban Aleph, aims to pull out some of the themes that permeate and contest the space of Cubanness as it exists in contemporary Cuban music making, suggesting that it is a complex, complicated and confused space, capable of housing numerous individualised interpretations and self-definition under the same broad rubric, all connected through a network of intertextual commonality; shared cultural, social and political signs that link together a sense of national identity.

In proposing such a theoretical tool for analysing not only Porno Para Ricardo’s place within contemporary Cuban culture, but also for analysing a broader context through a single point, there are inevitable caveats to address. Here I wish to address several of these theoretical issues, not to destabilise the Aleph’s potential efficacy as an analytical tool, but rather to map out some of the real-world limitations to this fictional device; attempting to draw at least some hazy boundaries around its infinite scope.

Beginning with this specific chosen case study – a punk band seldom heard within Cuba – there is a clear danger of assigning to Porno Para Ricardo an undue emphasis; a power in defining ‘what is Cuban’ beyond their means. Porno Para Ricardo, though musically interesting and politically notorious, at best still cut a marginal figure on the periphery of Cuba’s *alternative* music scene, let alone the entire musical sphere, let alone national culture⁴¹. The suggestion that this band may be considered something of a prism through which to assess the state of Cuban identity does not necessarily claim of the band that they are indicative of, or essential to, or even significantly influential upon, the construction of Cuban culture. I have not chosen Porno Para Ricardo as a case study – a potential Aleph – because of their significance within, or their ability to *shape* or *shift* perceptions of Cubanness through their overt lyrical and political manifesto laid down in their music.

⁴¹ This is perhaps slightly less true of late than it was at the start of this dissertation. Spells living outside of Cuba have introduced Porno Para Ricardo more forcefully to the internet. There has been a vast increase in YouTube videos, documentaries and blog pieces accompanying their recent tour of Europe.

Rather than their power to impact upon conceptions of Cubanness, this work is concerned with the band's ability to *reflect* it. Such a process requires deeper analyses of a more varied selection of the band's oeuvre, and a desire to look beyond the bluster of defiantly profane slights on Fidel Castro himself, something many commentaries on the band that exist seem reticent to do,⁴² and to examine the less outrageous as reflections of a Cuban everyday. It is precisely their position on the peripheries of Cuban culture – politically, socially, culturally, musically – that affords them such an interesting vantage point, and an engaging place from which to test the theoretical potential (and limitations) of the Aleph, problematising many of the boundary lines (geographical as well as political) that demarcate the spaces 'within' and 'outside' the Revolution comprising Cuban identity.

Though proposing the use of an ostensibly limitless tool for analysis here, inevitably, this dissertation contains blind spots, omissions, unseen symbols and vistas, integral parts of the Cuban condition not addressed. Yet, if *Porno Para Ricardo* can be said to be an Aleph, then these limitations upon the visions and vistas seen cannot come from the Aleph itself. In Borges' story, as Daneri's description attests, the Aleph is flawlessly clear, it is "the only place on earth where all places are - seen from every angle, each standing clear, without any confusion or blending" (1945:7). If there is no confusion, no obfuscation, within the Aleph itself, if such failings are present in views seen through the Aleph, then they are due to the limitations of the viewer. These limitations are twofold as expressed in Daneri's instructions for use:

Let me warn you, you'll have to lie flat on your back. Total darkness, total immobility, and a certain ocular adjustment will also be necessary. (Borges: 1945:7)

In Daneri's instructions, perhaps this 'ocular adjustment' alludes to little more than allowing one's eyes to become accustomed to the total darkness of the cellar, but in more abstract terms, perhaps this necessity for the viewer to adjust his/her sight shifts the flaw away from the Aleph itself and onto the viewer. The capacity to view *everything* within a microcosm cannot help but to demand a selectivity, and hence a partial blindness, on the part of the viewer. As Edward Soja notes of his theorised 'Thirdspace' Aleph:

This all-inclusive simultaneity opens up endless worlds to explore and, at the same time, presents daunting challenges. Any attempt to capture this all-encompassing space in words and texts, for example, invokes an immediate sense of impossibility, a despair that the sequentiality of language and writing, of the narrative form and

⁴² This is not to suggest that these overtly political stabs at Fidel Castro (and, latterly, his successor Raúl Castro) are not significant either in addressing the band's identity, or in their reflection of Cuban identity, and these lyrics will be addressed throughout the work of this thesis. However, they are only one constituent part of the band's oeuvre – one reflection – and need to be contextualised within the numerous other concerns that the band's work concerns itself with.

history-telling, can never do more than scratch the surface of Thirdspace's extraordinary simultaneities (1996:57).

Defining the parameters of the 'entirety' that may be glanced through the prism of a Cuban punk band is a problematic, and possibly futile, conundrum. *Can* a holistic picture of Cuban culture or identity (or even narrower, Cuban music) be seen reflected in Porno Para Ricardo's work? Or is 'Cuba' itself the ineffable boundary line to the perceptions? Can something be seen of global cultural flow, or perceptions of U.S., British and other nations' musics/identities in this Cuban punk Aleph?

Perhaps here, as with Borges himself, begins the despair of delineating the purportedly limitless, and too where the analogy between the fictional (and presumably flawlessly perfect) Aleph and this claimed real-world (and distinctly flawed) version falls down. There are bound to be blind spots in Porno Para Ricardo's reflective Aleph of Cuban culture, as there are bound to be omissions in this dissertation and its analyses⁴³ – not only omissions of important aspects of Cuban identity, but of the band's work too – and once again, I refer to the opening paragraph. This work, though claiming an analytical tool *capable* of totality, does not claim to have grasped such. Visions seen through the Aleph depend as much upon the viewer as they do the prism itself, and the analyses presented in this work as six distinct chapters represent a tentative first glance, rather than a completed epic poem (as the 'owner' of the Aleph in Borges' story - Carlos Argentino Daneri - attempts) describing the totality of Cuban identity in every detail.

Looking at vistas through this proposed punk Aleph necessarily reveals a 'partiality' in both sense of the word, for the viewer must only select certain vistas, certain events that may catch the eye, and in doing so, reveal a bias. Those things that attract the gaze inside the

⁴³ One particular aspect, present in earlier drafts of this work, but omitted as it would require a significant study of its own to do justice to, is the conception of 'Africanness' as a ubiquitous (yet often mythologised) 'root' present in *all* aspects of Cuban identity. One particularly Cuban saying has it that '*el que no tiene de Congo, tiene de Carabalí*' – 'he who does not 'have' from Congo, 'has' from Carabalí', suggesting that all Cubans share some root – all 'have' something – from Africa. Yet, as many writers have noted, many socio-cultural aspects demonstrating a contemporary affiliation with a sense of Africanness have been marginalised and censored under the Revolution, despite their official extolment of this 'African root'. *Santería* and other African-derived religious and spiritual practices have often been officially marginalised, though they appear to have a much more prominent place now. The problematically complex notion of this purported 'collective Africanness' as integral to Cuban identity, coupled with the ongoing problems of racism and desires for black Cubans to assert a personal, unique and separate identity, are discussed by a number of writers, including Sujatha Fernandes (2003), Lourdes Chacón Núñez (2009), Mette Louise Berg (2005), and Carlos Moore (1998). The nueva trova songwriter Pedro Luis Ferrer (interview with the author, 2010) has also problematised the reduction of 'Africa' and its realisation in Cuba to certain distinctly West-African cultural signifiers (inflected with the trauma of slavery), suggesting something of a "double Africanness" which addresses these West African influences, but also North African/ Southern Spanish inflections and influences upon Cuban culture (such as the *laúd*, a commonly used instrument in Cuba's rural traditional musics). As far as Porno Para Ricardo are concerned, the ubiquitous presence (or lack thereof) of an 'African' component or commentary upon this aspect of Cuban identity, is a telling omission from their soundscape. However, this thesis does not address the issue of 'Africanness' in relation to its *lack* of presence in the band's work.

Aleph, those visions reported, are perhaps things that reveal as much about the viewer as they do about the view.

In this sense, there is a double filter of partiality that must be conceded in such a work as this. Firstly, there is the partiality of Porno Para Ricardo themselves as reflectors of contemporary Cuban society. The very 'authenticity' afforded to the band by speaking candidly about Cuban culture, identity, politics and society from the vantage point of their own particular, individual experiences thereof also affords them a specificity, and a slant of vision, that is, by its very nature, not representative of the everyday for other Cubans. This is particularly the case with overt political censorship and state reprimand visited upon the band. Where other Cubans may feel this sense of repression in a more tacit, implicit and non-confrontational manner (though they still feel its impact upon the everyday, and thus it is still a pressing, though often unvoiced, concern), Porno Para Ricardo experience it as overt and explicit, confronting it head-on. As such, their expression of contemporary Cuban identity expresses precisely *their* experience of contemporary Cuba, and, in many ways, is therefore unrepresentative of the lives of the groups of Cubans, outlined by many commentators⁴⁴ that either still support the Revolution, or who publicly acquiesce to its regime.

Atop this individual partiality that stems from providing a personalised commentary on the everyday, there is also the partiality of analysis that this dissertation itself brings. Presented here are six momentary flashes, six tropes of a supposed Cuban identity. The extent to which these tropes *are* expressive of contemporary Cubanness, or even the extent to which the band themselves utilise these elements to better communicate such an identity (or the extent to which they are conscious of these moments at all, a charge that could be levelled most pointedly at the analyses of chapters five and six; the uses of laughter and noises respectively), are moot points. What the selection of these particular six examples does (also) attest to is the proclivity of this writer; the partialities and experiences I have had, not only of Cuba and Cuban music, society, bureaucracy and people, but of my experiences and consternations with the construction of my own personal identity.

There is a sense of projecting an image onto the mirror, indeed of selecting the vistas from the Aleph one wants to fine and ignoring those that do not, at work herein. It is clear that the elements selected as key sites of identity construction in the work of this band (particularly remembrance of childhood and cultural points of reference, and the

⁴⁴ Kapcia (2000), (2005), Moses (2000), Perna (2005), Aguirre (1997), Suchlicki (2000), Perez (1999) to name a few.

importance of grounding those remembrances in geographical locations), are indicative of my own sense of identity. At the same time as this work presents reflections of contemporary Cuban identity as expressed through the work of a Cuban punk band, it is also suggesting my own feelings towards this topic. This is not to negate the veracity of the assertions made throughout this work as to the nature of contemporary Cubanness, rather, it is to admit to the 'participant-observer' nature of the analyses, and to recognise the partiality, both of the case study and the author, of this work.

Just as *Porno Para Ricardo* are not capable of *shaping* the course of Cuban identity, neither politically and socially, nor musically and subculturally, it is as important to assert that they are by no means the singular site through which one may visit all of Cuban space. In his post-destruction postscript, Borges ponders the possibility that multiple such Alephs may exist:

Around 1867, Captain Burton held the post of British Consul in Brazil. In July, 1942, Pedro Henríquez Ureña came across a manuscript of Burton's, in a library at Santos, dealing with the mirror which the Oriental world attributes to Iskander Zu al-Karnayn, or Alexander Bicornis of Macedonia. In its crystal the whole world was reflected. Burton mentions other similar devices -- the sevenfold cup of Kai Kosru; the mirror that Tariq ibn-Ziyad found in a tower (*Thousand and One Nights*, 272); the mirror that Lucian of Samosata examined on the moon (*True History*, I, 26); the mirrorlike spear that the first book of Capella's *Satyricon* attributes; Merlin's universal mirror, which was "round and hollow... and seem'd a world of glas" (*The Faerie Queene*, III, 2, 19) -- and adds this curious statement: "But the aforesaid objects (besides the disadvantage of not existing) are mere optical instruments. The Faithful who gather at the mosque of Amr, in Cairo, are acquainted with the fact that the entire universe lies inside one of the stone pillars that ring its central court... No one, of course, can actually see it, but those who lay an ear against the surface tell that after some short while they perceive its busy hum (Borges, 1945:11).

In this light, the description of the Aleph as "*one* of the points in space that contains all other points" (1945:6, emphasis added) begins to restore something of a more pragmatic and applicable sense to an otherwise fantastical analytical tool. There may be myriad such 'potential Alephs' capable of describing many different 'types' of space. Can *Porno Para Ricardo* be claimed as a point that contains all other points of the space of contemporary Cuban identity? The claim is made less antagonistic if one allows for the potential for any number of other socio-cultural artefacts may be capable of similarly reflecting all other points in that same space. The picture sketched by the potential for numerous Alephs, rather than one of a mystical 'centre' to which all other points are attracted, speaks more of a network of interconnected points in communication with one another. Perhaps *Porno Para Ricardo* would be one such point reflected in the hypothetical constellation of Alephs.

This suggestion that there may be a constellation of Alephs each capable of reflecting Cubanness is not to make the selection of Porno Para Ricardo as a case study seem arbitrary. Rather, it is, as previously expressed, a way of thinking about the band that writes them back into the narrative of Cuban socio-cultural practice and identity, exploring and expanding upon the vantage points through which one might look out onto the vista of Cuban identity. Again, it is precisely because Porno Para Ricardo are made such marginal figures, and yet the presence and importance of Cuban culture is so apparent in their work, that makes them engaging subjects for such analysis.

To ground this theoretical claim in something (slightly) less ethereal, Edward Soja takes Borges' Aleph as a device to describe his conception of a "Thirdspace", defining it as:

...the space where all places are capable of being seen from every angle, each standing clear; but also a secret and conjectured object, filled with illusions and allusions, a space that is common to all of us yet never able to be completely seen or understood. (Soja, 1996:56)

Soja's holistic-yet-illusive Thirdspace works in a complex and malleable "trialectic" with a "Firstspace [which] is explored primarily through its readable texts and contexts" and a "Secondspace [which is explored] through its prevailing representational discourses" (1996:22), further suggesting that "Firstspace epistemologies become fixated on the material form of things in space: with human spatiality seen primarily as outcome or product" (1996:76), whereas "Secondspace epistemologies are immediately distinguishable by their explanatory concentrations on conceived rather than perceived space and their implicit assumption that spatial knowledge is primarily produced... through the spatial workings of the mind" (1996:78-9). Edward Soja's Thirdspace seeks to mediate between these two spaces thus:

Thirdspace... can be described as a creative recombination and extension, one that builds upon a Firstspace perspective that is focussed on the "real" material world and a Secondspace perspective that interprets this reality through "imagined" representations of spatiality (Soja, 1996:6).

But in labelling Porno Para Ricardo's reflection of Cubanness as something of a Thirdspace, what might be termed the First- and Secondspaces? Though contestable, precisely because of its often tacitly defined nature, something of a 'Firstspace' Cubanness could be said to exist within the Revolution's framework of Cuban identity⁴⁵. Constructed

⁴⁵ It is not the desire, nor is it within the scope, of this dissertation to fully outline this revolutionary 'space' of Cuban identity. Describing this definition of Cubanness as a 'firstspace' is problematic in that this space is just as conceived, just as ideological, imagined and 'of the mind' as any of the 'secondspaces' discussed herein. However, this revolutionary model of Cubanness is lent a political power, and thus a certain agency that other descriptions of Cuban identity from elsewhere are not afforded. It is, thus, a firstspace of political power.

partially from the edifices of the previous independence wars against the Spanish, and contests against the U.S. in Platt Amendment Cuba, and steeped in socialist rhetoric and claims of autochthonous culture, the desire to define Cuban identity as a singular and all-encompassing space has come to define the Revolution and its outlook on Cubanness. Such a desire in itself has long found voice in Cuban history. Rafael Hernandez and Haroldo Dilla go as far as to suggest that a “worldview characteristic of Cuban culture [has existed] from its inception...in the seventeenth century” (1992:31-32). The Cuban academic and radio presenter Mario Masvidal makes clear both the potency and prevalence of symbols of national identity when discussing Cuban music:

For decades... Cuban traditional dance music – they stereotype we all have in our minds – you know, salsa, mambo, rumba, all that... has become a banner of patriotism in Cuba, especially after 1959 (2007).

The notion of an archetypal national identity is prevalent in many nation states, often existing as a tacit set of stereotypical characteristics bound and defined through historical, social and cultural factors and interrelations with other nations, which are seldom overtly addressed and exist as part of the (constructed) fabric of ‘tradition’, ‘culture’ and ‘nationhood’. To try and pin down such characteristics or signs here would be to expand this introduction beyond the meaning of the word. Suffice to say, numerous works address the issue of Cuban identity as defined and managed within different historical epochs⁴⁶, and this work will address individual aspects of this ‘Firstspace’ Cuban identity as they are reflected and represented (and contested) within Porno Para Ricardo’s soundworld. Once more, this list of characteristic ‘fence posts of national identity’ are far from exhaustive⁴⁷. This desire to define the characteristics of the nation from a distinct political bent, has led to an often rigidly defined, and closely tended definition of what constitutes an ‘authentically Cuban’ identity. Again, this rigidity is encapsulated in Fidel Castro’s ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ the Revolution declaration: that which is deemed ‘outside the Revolution’ (a political state made geographical, due to different “vintages” (Pedraza-Bailey, 1984) of migration from Cuba, most commonly across the Straits of Florida) is considered ‘non-Cuban’ and as a result, the conception of national identity becomes a politically, culturally and geographically bounded set of conventions, defined by the real-world set of social signs and material reality themselves micromanaged by the Revolution.

⁴⁶ As a brief list of work that have been instrumental to this thesis: Arango (1997), Buckwater-Arias (2005) Centeno, and Font (1997), De La Fuente (2001), Fernandes (2006) Gott, (2004) Hernández, and Dilla (1992), Kapcia (1982, 2005), Moore, (1997, 2006), Moses (2000), Ortiz, (1995), Pacini Hernandez and Garofalo (1999), Perez, (1999), Perna (2005), Sánchez (2010).

⁴⁷ Again, I refer to my book ‘Outside the Revolution; Everything’ (2012) which, though far from exhaustive itself, outlines some of these fence posts of national identity in a little more depth in its opening chapter.

In the tumult and trauma of the Special Period, as confidence in such apparent material realities was severely shaken,⁴⁸ many Cubans, both within and outside the island, began to reassess and redefine notions of Cuban identity on every level – from the grand, overarching narratives of history, culture and politics, to the minutia of everyday life, to the geographical boundaries of the nation. Antoni Kapcia has suggested that in the Special Period, the notion of a unified Cuban voice, representative of the populace both spatially and temporally, with tendrils reaching both through time and unifying space, was fractured. “Cuban culture [became] ‘*un archipiélago*’ of individualism” (2005:191), claims Kapcia, and in many senses the conception of Cuban identity became a similar *archipiélago*; stemming from many of the same sources, but distinctly and individually defined and possibly even isolated from one another. Many commentators, Kapcia included (2000, 2005), have noted that participation in overt displays of national community diminished dramatically in the Special Period, and as Jaime Suchlicki notes, Cuban identity retreated back to the individual, familial scale, if ever it had existed in national(istic) terms:

Introduced by Castro in the 1960s, this concept [of the “new Cuban man”] called for a change in the values and attitudes of most Cubans. Allegiances would be transferred from the family to the party and the fatherland. The influence of the church would be eliminated. Devotion to the cause of communism would prevail. Man would consciously labour for the welfare of society, and the collective would supersede the individual one (2000:78-9).

This retreat into individualism and fragmentation of the national voice led Vázquez Montalbán to describe an environment in which “the newest Cuban art and literature ignore any sense of identification with the Revolution” (1998:359-360). Cuban art, it seems, ceased to show fidelity to the ‘event’ of the Revolution and national terms, and began to couch itself in the familial, the small-scale, the ‘everyday’ (removed from socialist idealisation), notions of hybridity and change, and the deeply personal.

So in this traumatic era of uncertainty, mass exodus and fundamental changes to previously unchangeable signifiers of Cubanness, Arturo Arango’s assertion that Cuban ‘artists’ “have opted for [exile] far less than other sectors [of society]” (1997:122) takes on an added significance⁴⁹. If Cuban culture had become individualistic, yet notions of Cubanness were still a central concern, then one must assume that there was a fundamental shift in what was seen as constituting ‘Cubanness’, at least in the world of the arts. In place of a singular

⁴⁸ Though, as Kapcia points out, crucially not entirely or irrevocably destroyed: “[The Special Period] recalled the darkest days of the 1960s, but without that decade’s hope, eating corrosively into social provision and morale... However, [it] proved not to be the end of the system but its nadir” (Kapcia, 2005:179-80).

⁴⁹ It is worth noting that Arango’s assertion here is not backed up by any analysis of Cuban migration statistics. For such analysis, I refer to Aguirre (1976), Aguirre and Bonilla Silva (2002) and Pedraza-Bailey (1985). However, that Arango would make such a claim, albeit anecdotally, is a telling face, and one worth exploring in its own right.

‘authentic Cubanness’ were smaller, distinct ‘authentic *Cubannesses*’, tentative steps towards subcultures even, which took their authenticity from the Cubanness of the individuals within them rather than some spurious historical lineage. Jennifer Hernández, keyboard player in heavy metal band ‘Escape’ perhaps sums up this sentiment best in the documentary ‘Cuba Rebelión’ (2009): “the media don’t pay attention to us, but they have to realise, the music we make is Cuban music too”. Here we see played out a ‘Secondspace’ Cubanness, as theorised by Edward Soja, using work by Henri Lefebvre; a Cubanness that is “primarily produced through discursively devised representations of space, through the spatial working of the mind. In its purest form, Secondspace is entirely ideational, made up of projections into the empirical world from conceived or imagined geographies” (Edward Soja, 1996:78-9); a Cubanness that can sound however the individual imagines it to sound. As opposed to the previously (ostensibly) ubiquitous ‘Cubanness’ that encapsulated ‘all that is Cuban’ into ‘one voice’, the ‘Secondspace Cubanness’ that many musicians in the genres of rock, hip hop and timba of the Special Period imagined was individually defined and deliberately personal. More accurately, a series of Secondspaces were imagined, each one different, each one an island in the chain of Kapcia’s archipelago⁵⁰.

If, for a moment, we allow ourselves to present the hegemonic ‘narrow’ definition of Cubanness as the (imagined, projected) Firstspace of Cuban identity; how things ‘really’ are, and take the Special Period ‘*archipelagoism*’ Kapcia invokes as something of a Secondspace; where one could imagine for oneself an individualised and individualistic Cubanness, then Porno Para Ricardo’s identity is truly a Thirdspace Cubanness; one that engages with both these spaces, yet seeks to transcend them, to parody and ridicule their isolating *dialogue*, yet seeks to embellish and embrace both into a *trialectic* that is always in search of more, is always in search of more accurate description, and is always looking deliberately for the tangents, gaps and omissions from either of these self-contained first two spaces.

Soja defines such a praxis as “Thirling as Othering”, a process that can “open up our spatial imaginaries to ways of thinking and acting politically that respond to all binarisms, to any attempt to confine thought and political action to only two alternatives, by interjecting an-Other set of choices” (1996:5). Porno Para Ricardo address and negotiating a litany of politically conceived binaries - ‘Miami and Havana’, ‘capitalism and socialism’, ‘before and after the Revolution’, ‘within and outside the Revolution’, ‘before and after the Special Period’, ‘within and outside Cuba’ ‘tradition and innovation’, ‘the countryside and the city’,

⁵⁰ This archipelagic chain of identities is discussed further in Chapter Three.

‘*gusanos y revolucionarios*’, ‘*patria o muerte*’⁵¹ – that pepper Cuban society and politics. Yet they approach the similar raft of binaries that exist musically⁵² - ‘authentic and inauthentic’, ‘traditional and non-traditional’, ‘autochthonous and borrowed’, ‘bolero, rumba, son and hip hop, rock, heavy metal’, ‘within and outside the music industry’, ‘for Cubans and for tourists’, ‘trained musician and self-taught’, ‘authentic musical template and authentic self-expression’ – in much the same way: by attempting to find ‘an-Other’ option. Ultimately, what constitutes Cubanness, both contemporaneously and historically, is an often winding, tangential path. Its identity exists within *both* spaces of identity construction, but also in the gaps *between* narratives, in the overlapping, liminal areas of competing and contrasting definitions.

What *Porno Para Ricardo* offer is a portrait of Cuba that is often hard to fathom, precisely because – as the *Aleph* – it contains within it fragments of many different *Cubannesses*. It is a Thirdspace reclamation of Cubanness; one that always seeks to add, to parody, to reject and to recontextualise, elements of itself. Yet *Porno Para Ricardo*’s Thirdspace is not concerned with finding ‘something else’ to this binaristic thinking; they do not seek ‘another way’ to the two established and crystallised potential positions, rather they seek to encompass and incorporate both these positions, and by doing so, make the rhetoric of definite *choice between* two always-already existent binaries obsolete. In *Porno Para Ricardo*’s reflections of a Thirdspace Cuban identity, the mutually exclusive and always held apart binaries are dissolved. It is, in a sense, a Thirdspace which does away with the notion of only ever having had two spaces to choose between in the first place.

Methodology

In writing a methodology for a work that aims to bring an autoethnographic voice – my own voice - to the subject of punk music and identity construction in Cuba, I am made wary by the concerns outlined by Roxanne Lynn Doty:

There is no clear methodology for having a presence in one’s own writing or for making connections. I would hate to see the doors that are being opened by autoethnography slowly swing shut because of too much concern with methodology (2010:1049).

The aim of this dissertation is to present *Porno Para Ricardo* as a constituent part of a wider, broader, augmented conception and construction of Cuban cultural and social

⁵¹ “*Patria o Muerte*” – “Fatherland or Death” – is one of the typically bombastic political slogans to be found on billboards around Cuba.

⁵² The distinction between musical and political binaries is perhaps something of a false dichotomy. This musical set certainly owe their construction to political (and Political) doctrines.

identity; to recognise that even a group ‘outside’ might be capable of reflecting crucial aspects of the whole; that even in this controversial punk space, a desire to claim and comment upon a sense of Cubanness is still of paramount importance. And so, to achieve such an aim, much of my research, much of my work as an ethnomusicologist, much of my thinking, has centred around such constructions and reflections of national identity in Cuban cultural texts. Methodologically, then, this work is not only describing Porno Para Ricardo’s relationship to, and understanding of, Cubanness, it is also, necessarily, relating *my own* attempts to comprehend and comment upon Cubanness.

As such, this dissertation adopts two parallel methodological approaches, both of which are pertinent to the concept of the Aleph. On the one hand, I approach the musical materials that constitute the case studies of each distinct chapter – the individual vistas of Cubanness – from a popular music studies perspective. Relevant theoretical work from a number of disciplines are brought to bear on each topic, with each chapter providing its own, bespoke literature review. These elements are then described, as, perhaps, the poet Daneri attempts in his epic poem in Borges’ short story, as a constituent element of Porno Para Ricardo’s Cubanness. However, each of these chapters, as well as the introduction and conclusion, are interspersed with a distinctly autoethnographic voice – the voice of myself as writer. Each of these moments – italicised and separated from the body of the text by asterisks – not only serve as a momentary flashes of something seen through this prospective Aleph, a jumping off point for the contents of each section, but also aim, as autoethnographic writing does, to assert that the voice of the writer is a part of this narrative, an inextricable part of this process of uncovering a reflection of Cuban identity.

As discussed above, this makes for a partial account of what is, obviously, a multifaceted and contradictory topic. But the aim is not to present a fully-expounded account of contemporary Cuban cultural identity (nor to offer the illusion of such), but rather to recognise such partialities not only as necessary, but as a potentially engaging and positive methodology. As Roxanne Lynn Doty writes, much academic writing purports an ‘absence of the self’, and with this absence comes “a power that enables scholars to present their work as authoritative, objective, and neutral” (2010:1048). It is the aim of this work not only, as Doty goes on to write of autoethnography, to “shun this power and make it clear that writers are part of their work, part of the story they tell” (ibid.), but to assert that such a position, replete with potential contradictions, self-critique, and partiality, by virtue of the fact that it demands further investigation and supplementation – further visits to the vistas of the Aleph – is itself a powerful and purposeful methodological approach to take.

Elizabeth Dauphinee writes of the importance of this autoethnographic voice as a way of puncturing the guise of academic writing as all-encompassing, closed and unbiased. She writes that:

The academic gaze is an all-encompassing gaze. It seeks to make sense of everything it encounters and, more significantly, to *master* what it encounters...what autoethnography... accomplishes is to focus attention on the relationship of the self to the world that is investigated (Dauphinee, 2010:806).

Dauphinee's conception of autoethnography "opens space for the reader to see the intentions – and not just the theories and methodologies – of the researcher" (2010:813), something I endeavour to do here in this 'methodological' section. My intention was to understand something about the desire to define Cuban identity that permeates so much of Cuban culture, and to do so by looking at the work of a band who have stood in such vehement opposition to so much that is 'Cuban'. It is also my intention to unpack some of my own relationship to, and understanding of, Cuban identity, culture, society and politics. The vignettes that pepper this work are then a reflection of this duality of identity reflection and construction. Not only do they serve as vistas seen through the prism of the Aleph, they are *part of* the Aleph.

The Aleph is not only a tool to investigate the subject of study – Porno Para Ricardo and Cuban cultural identity – it is also a way of writing. It informs both the methodology and the structure of this dissertation. It offers a methodological tool that is necessarily autoethnographic, that revels in its own partiality, and which engages the viewer in conversation with the subject being viewed. But it also offers a way to write about those experiences that relates to the two-way mirror of the Aleph. It offers a way to write that can be introspective, self-critical, hesitant, contradictory even (an important point when trying to pin down a punk aesthetic), and yet which can still make some resolute conclusions on what has been seen and what has been felt.

This dissertation, then, relies on my own experiences of visiting and attempting to understand the Cuban cultural and social landscape, and my autoethnographic writing as a way to articulate these experiences. It also relies on the meetings I have had with the band (primarily with Gorki), and the interviews, conversations and observations I have conducted. This research took place in three separate research trips over a period of three years. Each of these research periods afforded a different experience of, and interaction with, Porno Para Ricardo as a band, and the band members as individuals.

I began my research into Porno Para Ricardo before the PhD began when, in May 2010, My wife and I took a three-week trip to Cuba. In this trip, as well as interviewing a range of

different musicians, I was first able to meet and interview Gorki and Ciro. Over two meetings, the first by chance encounter, the second by arrangement, I spoke to both songwriters of Porno Para Ricardo, and I was able to record one semi-structured interview with both Gorki and Ciro separately. These interviews are referenced throughout this work (as Gorki, 2010 and Ciro, 2010) and became the backbone of this dissertation. I was struck by how candidly Gorki in particular spoke about his creative practice, his relationship to wider Cuban cultural, social and political contexts, his interest in traditional Cuban music and his continued interest in making music from the margins of society. Many of the individual chapter themes stem from these central interviews. In particular, both Gorki and Ciro spoke about their use of humour and laughter in their work, the place of cover versions and relationships to different genres and musics, themes addressed in Chapters Five and Four respectively. Both spoke about the uneasy position the band occupy between friki subcultures and the state infrastructure, an issue running throughout this dissertation, but addressed most overtly in Chapter Three. And both spoke about their contestations with, and yet reliance on, certain symbols of national identity; their reluctance to be inculcated into a nationalist rhetoric, and yet a desire to represent and reclaim a sense of Cubanness for themselves, again, a theme running throughout this work, but addressed in different iterations, in Chapters One and Two.

This research trip also gave me my first experience of Cuba as an academic⁵³ interested in the everyday, the constructions of Cuban identity through these everyday routines. Some of my autoethnographic experiences of this first research trip serve as the vignettes interspersed throughout the introduction to this work.

In the summer of 2011, Gorki contacted me to say that Porno Para Ricardo would be playing their first ever gig outside of Cuba, at a summer festival in Prague. This event, at which the band would be second headliners on the main stage, would provide a rare opportunity to witness a live performance of the band ‘most famous for not playing’. Unfortunately, with only days to go before the gig, it became clear that the band had been denied exit visas by the Cuban government and would not be able to perform. Gorki, who at the time was living in Mexico, would still perform, and would be backed by Lithuanian band ‘Alaverdi’.

⁵³ Before this trip in May 2010, I have visited Cuba three other times. Of course, these previous trips have provided a foundational insight into Cuban culture which I was able to draw upon. Again, as throughout this dissertation, I am indebted to my Cuban family for their unending encouragement and assistance in my work.

This event allowed me again to talk informally with Gorki, getting updates on his time in and out of Cuba, his new plans for the recording studio and future recordings with the band, and his continued altercations with state power. I was also able to see Gorki perform live, albeit without the other members of Porno Para Ricardo, and to witness his interactions with an audience. Of particular interest at this gig, to me, was Gorki's performance of symbols and representations of Cuban identity. Within this performance were intriguing iterations of many of the aspects of Cubanness that I had already begun to write about in the different chapters. Issues of remembrance, place, subculture and state, cover versions, laughter and noise, were all abundantly present in this performance. And so, again, I was perhaps provided a series of vistas – glimpses through the Aleph – at the performance of a type of Cubanness; Gorki and the ersatz Porno Para Ricardo acting as that 'punk Aleph' for the audience.

The vignettes at the beginnings of each chapter are taken from this performance in Prague, and each offer a complimentary vista from the Aleph as performed live. From these momentary flashes, each chapter will then look more closely at some of the iterations of this element of Cubannes as expressed within Porno Para Ricardo's oeuvre. The aim here is to explore each vista in a little more depth; these vignettes providing confirmation of each element's significance within the work of Porno Para Ricardo (and so perhaps within constructions of Cuban identity more broadly), and also a jumping off point from which to explore the band's work, in a kind of feedback loop again associated with the act of staring at the Aleph.

In November of 2013, we made another, longer trip to Cuba. Spending ten weeks flitting between Havana and Santa Clara, I was able to gain further insight into a sense of the everyday in Cuba (on this occasion, my wife and I rented a small apartment in Havana, bringing with it a whole new set of social and logistical hurdles which cast new light on my interactions with Cuba), and again, aspects of these autoethnographic reflections are interspersed throughout, and inform, the majority of the conclusion to this work. Importantly, I was also able to observe a Porno Para Ricardo band practice and to sit in with the band as they mixed a track for their now-completed album '*Maleconazo Ahora*'. These encounters took place in the fully refurbished *La Paja Recold* recording studio.

Again, accounts of these experiences – watching the band actually playing together live for the first time at the end of nearly four years of writing about, listening to and thinking about their performances of Cubanness – serve as an interesting bookend to my experiences with Porno Para Ricardo, and again inform much of the work in the

conclusion to this dissertation. Vignettes from these experiences are presented throughout the conclusion, serving as a bookend to the introduction's accounts of an initial experience of Cuba.

It is my hope, as Roxanne Lynn Doty writes, to “convey many important issues, including perhaps things like ontology and methodology, within the context of a story” (2010:1050). That is, the structure of this work, with its vignettes and realisations of self, with its vistas seen through the prism of an ever-shifting, ever-oblique, ever-partial Aleph that reflects as much of the viewer as it does of the view, with its attempts to make sense of a constellation of myriad identities by addressing my own place within that space, is not only a methodology in itself, but also a reflection of the theoretical tool of the Aleph as well. The Aleph then becomes not only a tool for analysis, but a way of writing, a way of structuring analysis, further increasing its efficacy by perhaps further muddying the waters with infinite vistas unseen.

Layout

As the interview drew to a close, Gorki's phone rang from the shadows of the corridor. A journalist from Miami. The line crackles and silences fill the room between hesitating answers. It becomes apparent that this interview is taking on a more overtly political line of interrogation. I stopped the recording I was making, and flipped through the small notebook I had been writing questions in. Innocent questions about punk bands and writing songs. Nothing like the grand, dictator-criticism, change-will-come narrative being fished for by this journalist across the Straits of Florida. I thought, with some chagrin, that all this journalist was looking for was a shocking dissident soundbite, a punk shout from the sidelines of Cuban society, a goaded rumble of rebellion from within the island, a cause célèbre for those defined as 'anti-Castro Cubans', for those geographically as well as politically 'outside'. Maybe I was envious that I hadn't been so upfront about politics in our short meeting. But Gorki's answers were curt and clipped. A reluctance to play the role as outspoken insider? A reluctance to do so over a phone line where any number of people could be listening (including neighbours)? Perhaps, I hoped, not wanting to leave me sitting sweating on the sofa? I walked out onto the balcony, the sun gone, but the evening air still hot and hanging heavy. The two sentinels on the park bench had left for the evening, or else had found a more surreptitious vantage point, and in the

growing darkness, the sounds of Havana drifted. Sounds of radios and reggaetón, telenovela theme tunes and pressure cookers hissing, shouted conversations from balconies and the quiet hum of traffic.

* * *

Although each of these chapters stands alone, and though some of the theoretical boundaries may be blurred, in essence they can be grouped into three parts by focus of analyses. These three parts may be said to correlate broadly with three central aspects of musicianship: lyrics, subculture and soundworld. So the first two chapters examine lyrical themes and content, looking at what the band find important enough to write songs about, which themes, ideas, memories, people and places are made markers of their identity. The middle two chapters examine the band within their local (and global) musical context. Issues of subcultural (and mainstream cultural) connection (and disconnection) are examined as a means of situating the band within the social and cultural landscape. Their relationships to their own genre of punk, and other genres of music are also examined. The final two chapters examine the soundworld of the band's recordings. How the music, and the concepts therein are captured, presented, and disseminated to an audience, and how the methods and means of production either support, augment or problematise assumed meanings. The sound of, and the sounds within, the bands recordings are analysed to determine further the identity of the band and its significance to aspects of Cubanness.

More specifically, Chapter One will tackle the problematically vast subject of remembrance, and how remembrances of the past may indicate some aspect of identity in the present. Particularly, this work will look at the band's remembrances of two troubled periods of Cuban history; the cultural and social (not to mention political and economic) presence of the Soviet Union in Cuba (particularly within the band's childhood of the late 1970s and 80s) and the traumatic Special Period following the collapse of the Soviet Union, specifically the mass exodus of the *balseros* (rafters) that has become one poignant and powerful symbol of the epoch. How the band address and 'remember' these moments, from a personal as well as from a more general perspective, hints at a desire to cement together the often fragmented 'evental'⁵⁴ slabs of Cuban history, on the other side of which one must 'start anew', and incorporate these forgotten or suppressed moments into a deeper understanding of contemporary Cuban society.

⁵⁴ This word is used to invoke Alain Badiou's concept of 'the event' as "compell[ing] the subject to invent a new way of being" (2001:42), a theoretical tool used within Chapter One.

Chapter Two advances the theory of ‘authentic places’ by addressing the geographical locations referenced in Porno Para Ricardo’s songs. It suggests the idea of locating and authenticating identity by anchoring it in, and thus claiming, specific places as ‘ours’. In analysis of the band’s references to a now defunct rock club called ‘*El Patio de María*’, I suggest that the band are asserting *their* Cubanness – the place of Cuba in their identity, and the presence of their identity within the matrix of Cubanness – by expounding their connections to geographical locations within Havana. However, the band are also somewhat critical of this process of authentication through place, and through an analysis of their more critical references to ‘*Parque G*’ – a park in central Havana which has strong affiliations to the *friki* subculture – I suggest that the band are critical of such practices, and that, for them, place and identity must be fought for, defined and re-defined.

Chapter Three examines the band’s relationship to the *friki* subculture, and the governmental institutions that run parallel to it, in greater depth. It looks at the band’s disgust at the institutionalisation of an ostensibly countercultural, anti-hegemonic music, but it also examines the contempt that the band have for those who have sought to define themselves through exclusive recourse to external cultural markers. In this chapter, Porno Para Ricardo are seen as walking a fine line between a traditional conception of Cuban music/identity, and an imported rock music/identity, and are as such positioned outside of both the Revolution and the *friki* subculture.

Chapter Four addresses the subject of covering; that is the practice of taking an existing musical text (and, to a greater or lesser extent, its surrounding intertextual, multimodal network) to define something of one’s own identity. This chapter examines the three examples of direct covering in the band’s repertoire – a punk rendition of a cartoon theme song, a deliberately garbled version of a classic rock ballad, and a studied, precise performance of a bolero standard. These diverse musical texts serve to illustrate the complex bricolage that goes into making any identity. They not only demonstrate the diverse range of musical sources that the band incorporate into their work, but demonstrate that when these fragments of identity are shown within their existing cultural networks, with new connections being established all the time, identity – personal and national – becomes a complex web of interconnected texts and modes that no single definition is sufficient to describe in its totality.

Chapter Five looks at examples of laughter as a constituent part of Porno Para Ricardo’s soundworld, and more broadly within conceptions of Cuban identity. Laughter has always been integral to conceptions of Cubanness. Both for the Revolution, and those (privately)

expressing a critique, laughter expresses a sense of defiance against overbearing, hegemonic forces seeking to suppress shards of identity. In Porno Para Ricardo's work, two distinct and different 'types' of laughter can be heard peppering the soundworld. The former is a humourless affectation, a performed, derisory laughter seeking to ridicule a target. The latter emerges more spontaneously, shows us the band's in-jokes and responds to the minutia of the Cuban everyday. Both these laughters serve to construct a space of identity for the band, though they do so in oppositional, yet complimentary, ways. One is an exclusionary laughter *at*, providing an identity in relief – what 'we' are *not*, whilst the other is an inclusionary laughter *about*, providing a sense of who 'we' *are*.

The final chapter addresses examples of non-musical 'noise' as it is deliberately incorporated into the band's musical material. The chapter addresses familiar theorisations of 'noise' as both a deconstructive/reconstructive force, and the band's insertion of noise into the sonic spaces of rock and chachacha is given as an example of their desire to problematise rigidly defined musical spaces and the identities associated with them. However, this chapter also looks at the incorporation of the familiar and the familial into a soundworld that represents an everyday Cubanness as a means perhaps of framing Porno Para Ricardo's more controversial sonic and lyrical signs within a recognisably Cuban context.

The conclusion to this work mirrors the introduction by 'returning' to Cuba via autoethnographic accounts of my research trip to Cuba in January 2013, where I was able to watch a band practise and sit in the recording studio as Ciro and Gorki finalised the band's most recent CD '*Maleconazo Ahora*' (2013). From here, the conclusion returns to the theoretical concept of the 'Aleph' addressing some of the issues with this theoretical tool with a closer reading of Borges' short story. Although the conclusion, in its deliberately fragmentary, autoethnographic style, is a little wary of asserting anything fixed and definitive regarding Porno Para Ricardo's Cubanness or their efficacy in reflecting or constructing conceptions of Cuban identity, and though it attempts to problematise the notions of holistic definitions of identity, suggesting that the concept of identity construction is always fluid, always open to new and diverse interpretations that do not always or necessarily usurp the old, but rather run coterminously to them, producing a complex skein of references, signs, symbols and texts which are made sense of at an individual level, but are always open to re-evaluation and redefinition, the conclusion further supports the claim of Porno Para Ricardo as an engaging (if problematic) lens through which to vision Cuban cultural identity. The conclusion also advances this concept

of the Aleph both as an effective tool for analysing popular music and for writing about it within an autoethnographic framework.

Ultimately, the view through this Cuban Aleph is both fleeting and partial (in both its bias and its incompleteness). It is not an attempt to define holistically a Cuban identity, but rather to pull at some of the threads of contemporary Cuban culture. In tentatively sketching their 'Thirdspace' of Cuban identity, the band do not necessarily construct an entirely 'new definition' of what it means to be Cuban, but rather seek to question the notion that there are only two spaces to begin with. This work looks at the minutiae of one band – stares at scenes in the Aleph – to ask how individuals construct *their* versions of a Cuban identity.

Chapter One: Remembrance

“¿Te acuerdas de la Libertad?”

* * *

I hand Gorki the fridge magnet and postcard I have just bought for him from the museum of Communism. The museum was little more than a ramshackle array of Soviet paraphernalia from the 50s and 60s, most of which would not look out of place in contemporary Cuba, situated above a McDonalds in Prague's city centre. The fridge magnet is a picture of 'Misha', the friendly teddy bear mascot from the 1980 Moscow Olympics, brandishing a Kalashnikov rifle, an ammunition belt slung over his shoulder. The postcard is of a Stalin look-alike in a silk smoking jacket, two scantily dressed women draped over him. Gorki turns to his guitar case, rummages about, and turns back wearing a pair of thick-rimmed tortoise shell reading glasses. He studies the fridge magnet for a moment, then smiles. He examines the postcard. “Ño. Que Rico⁵⁵”.

Introduction: Remembering a National Identity

To begin an examination of the work of a punk band by addressing the use of remembrance may seem a strange place to start. Punk, as a global genre, often tends to position itself in the present (Karen Pinkus, 1996); somewhere between the ‘no future’ of the Sex Pistols and the jettisoning of the past⁵⁶ as irrelevant. Yet for Porno Para Ricardo, remembrance is a recurring theme. From memories of childhood, to projected imaginations of traumatic events, from the nostalgic, to pointed socio-political commentary, from the deeply personal, to the potentially communal, the band seem determined to remember.

As Lisandro Perez accurately surmises “predicting Cuba is like hitting in baseball: if you're batting .300, you're doing great” (2008:86). What is true for predicting the future of this complex and contradictory island seems to be similarly true for remembering its past. How and what one remembers speaks strongly to one's political identity in a country where history has become deeply politicised. So the memories, the remembrances, and the ways in which those remembrances are enacted in song and artwork in Porno Para Ricardo's oeuvre can certainly help detail aspects of the band's – and Cuba's – identity, but they can do so only from a very personalised, and biased, perspective.

⁵⁵ A distinctly Cuban phrase, difficult to translate exactly, meaning “Wow. Fantastic!”

⁵⁶ One example would be the Clash lyrics “phony Beatlemania has bitten the dust”, from ‘London Calling’.

What Porno Para Ricardo choose to remember speaks not only of a rejection of the revolutionary mode of remembrance; that of heroic moments, specific events and reified exemplars of Cubanness, but also of a desire to incorporate these ‘other’ memories into a wider framework (one that houses revolutionary rhetoric as well), and to use remembrance as a tool to better understand the social and cultural *mis en scène* of the present. By remembering what is often left out of the grander narrative, Porno Para Ricardo assert a sort of ‘popular memory’, following the terminology of Tara Brabazon (2005), that demonstrates that “there is always resistance to dominant memory and contestation is always possible”(2005:67). They assert that the quotidian speaks as firmly to the sense of Cuban identity as does the evental. Through remembrance that is both personal and quotidian, yet which strives for recontextualised collectivity and which insists upon remembering that which is ‘left out’, the band begin to augment the space of Cuban identity, adding threads of remembrance back into the skein of contemporary national identity (or perhaps showing that these aspects were always already present).

By expanding the wealth of remembrances that constitute a Cuban identity, the band aim to connect together often disparate epochs of Cuban history, and by doing so, they aim to better understand, and more accurately contextualise, the present day. By re-remembering aspects omitted from one particular narrative of Cuban identity (such as these quotidian voices, or the importing of Soviet culture), they are not engaging in an act of ‘forgetting’; one that makes the Revolution an obsolescence, and excises it from *their* contemporary Cubanness. Rather they make the heroic flash points of revolutionary remembrance constituent parts of a more holistic Cubanness. Each of these ‘types’ of remembrance – the heroic and the quotidian, the personal and the collective – become tools for understanding the present. If, as Brabazon suggests, “through Popular Memory Studies, the past is neither pristine nor static, but a living skeleton on which the flesh of the present clings” (ibid.), then the examples of remembrance that Porno Para Ricardo provide seek to add new bones to the skeleton, and thus provide a better and more robustly defined ‘body’ of contemporary Cuban identity.

An ‘Unwaved Flag’ of Cuban Identity

The on-going socio-political project of the Cuban Revolution has had an often contradictory relationship to the island’s historical narrative, simultaneously striving to remember in service of legitimising revolutionary effort, yet demanding to forget for much the same reasons. As Kate Quinn notes:

The contradiction at the heart of the historical agenda of the Revolution lay in the tension between the impetus to create a new history to reflect the regime's break with the former social structures, values and norms, and the narrative of continuity (the Revolution as the fulfilment of history) that depended upon an established fund of nationalist historical myths. (2007:382)

So while the completeness of remembrance may be problematic in the revolutionary conception and construction of Cuban identity, that it is of great importance to that same construction is not. As with many aspects of Cuban social, political and cultural practices, history and the act of remembrance are inextricably inculcated in the obsessive process of defining a sense of national identity. And it is a particular kind of remembrance, and a particular series of remembered things, that map a historical narrative of 'evental moments', often personified by exemplar Cubans, that are collectively celebrated as a guide to national identity.

Certainly this trope of remembering the momentous as a means of constructing the contemporary is played out vigorously in much of Cuban discourse. Key tipping points in the narrative of the Revolution and its success are reified and made central to the narrative of *contemporary* Cuban identity. This type of remembrance takes on the qualities of a Badiouian 'event', where not only does a single moment herald the necessity for "a complete break with the continuum of being" (Elliott, 2010:2), but that event requires an ongoing remembrance – a *fidelity* – to emphasise its pertinence to the present state of being.

There may not be anything particularly unique in the case of the Cuban Revolution utilising historical remembrance as a means of both defining a national identity and legitimising itself as the custodian and authentic manifestation thereof. However, as Nicola Miller suggests, perhaps Cuba is exceptional within Latin America and the Caribbean for both the prevalence of this obsession with national identity, and the nature of the events remembered. Miller writes that "unlike other Latin American countries, Cuba had already developed a powerful vision of national identity before becoming a nation state in 1902" and the various wars of independence "had all lent Cuban history an epic dimension well before 1959" (2003:152).

It is this grand scale of history that the Revolution has particularly sought to remember as central to its construction of a holistic Cuban identity, and its calls for collective remembrance are to be seen in all manner of public events and celebrations, from the "secular calendar of saints' days" (Quinn, 2007:386) provided by the litany of revolutionary heroes and their nationalist predecessors – defiant faces painted on every wall, wire-line murals illuminating *Plaza de la Revolución*, stern white busts at every school and official

building – as well as the catalogue of moments-as-tipping-points through which both the Revolution was won and Cuban identity was defined and solidified. Thus Cubans are told to ‘remember the five heroes’ caught and detained in Miami⁵⁷, perpetually reminded of the expedition of the *Granma* that brought Fidel Castro, Che Guevara⁵⁸ and the band of original revolutionaries back to the shores of the island. For the Revolution, “*siempre es 26*” (“it is always the 26th [of July]”), the date⁵⁹ encapsulating, through repeated remembrance of the evental moment of the revolutionary project, the essence of Cuban identity. The 26th of July thus becomes a remembrance of identity, a kind of persistent ‘groundhog day’ on which Cuban identity was constructed and through the remembrance of which Cuban identity is maintained.

The central paradox of Cuban remembrance is that it seeks to both break from a past, and yet is fixated upon remembrance. Similarly, via recourse to remembrance, the Revolution has established itself as both a new way of being Cuban – an interruption to the perpetual domination from other nations, variously Spain and the U.S. – and yet simultaneously an accumulation – a natural endpoint – to these various struggles; one which requires a remembrance of this past to situate and authenticate itself as expressing a continued sense of Cubanness. Having established itself as both break from and continuation of Cuban history/identity, the Revolution then engages in an insistent ‘remembrance of itself’ as a way to continue its own pertinence within the socio-cultural space of Cuban life.

This trope of a moment “*on the edge of a void, or foundational*” (Badiou, 2006:175), on the ‘other side’ of which a new way of being is constructed which requires a certain fidelity, enacted through remembrance is described by Alain Badiou’s concept of ‘the event’.

Indeed, Badiou uses the example of the French Revolution as one such example of an event. Caused (but not inevitably so) by an evental site – a “*local*” site “inside a situation, in which certain multiples (but not others) are on the edge of a void” (2006:176), the event itself ruptures the continuum and becomes a single point that is descriptive of and described by all the mitigating factors that sparked it: a “one-mark of its own multiple” in Badiou’s words (2006:180).

⁵⁷ The five ‘heroes of the Revolution’ refers to the five Cuban intelligence officers arrested in Miami for espionage in 1998. Billboards proclaiming ‘*Volverán*’ – ‘They Will Return’ - have become a prominent symbol of Cuban defiance, and a key site of national remembrance of ‘heroic’ and momentous actions.

⁵⁸ The phrase ‘*Seremos como el Che*’ – ‘We will be like Che’ – is one of the oft repeated maxims of the Revolution, and has become the motto of the *Pioneros* (a kind of revolutionary youth organisation). The phrase points to a literalisation of remembrance as identity construction, as Cuban youth, in remembering Che, are given a model of identity.

⁵⁹ The 26th of July refers to the day of the attack on the Moncada Barracks, and thus the beginning of the Cuban Revolution. It is a national holiday in Cuba, and is accompanied by mass marches and ‘celebrations’.

Richard Elliott (2010), in analysis of the revolutionary anthem '*y en eso llego Fidel*' by Carlos Puebla⁶⁰, has described how the Revolution-as-Event has been addressed within Cuba. Coming at a localised tipping point in history, puncturing and redefining the site, requiring "the subject[s] to invent a new way of being" (Badiou, 2001:42), and establishing an on-going 'fidelity' (the word particularly piquant given the personification of the Cuban Revolution) that, through remembrance, is made central to this 'new way of being'. In the chorus of Puebla's song, the event, given its own *one-mark* as a signifier – Fidel Castro – as another in the long line of 'Great Men' of Cuban history and identity construction, is both remembered and made an on-going concern:

Y se acabó la diversión, llegó el comandante y mandó a parar.

And that was the end of the party, the commander arrived and ordered to stop.

Where the choruses celebrate the arrival of this event, the verses also remember the maligned 'before', a time of unwanted imperialism, of foreigners taking advantage of Cuban exploitation (it is for these foreigners that the party has been stopped). Though the Cuban Revolution is seen as a break from the epoch of 'before', unlike Badiou's description of "evental sites block[ing] the infinite regression of combinations of multiples" and thus "*found[ing]* the situation because they are the absolutely primary terms therein" (2006:175), the Cuban Revolution, through its insistence upon remembering both its own pantheon of heroes and evental moments preceding it (the Revolution itself is showing some kind of fidelity to these moments 'before' by completing the act of fighting for Cuban independence), places itself as something of a constellation of events within a wider constellation of events preceding – and constructing – it. Thus there is both a sense of inevitability about the Revolution, as well as a necessity which is founded through the remembrance – perhaps even a 'fidelity' to – the negativity of what came before. Thus, though a 'new way of being' is professed as taking place on the other side of this event – the Revolution – it is one that requires a continued remembrance of the past both to legitimise it (a fidelity to wars of independence) and to justify it (the social conditions that made it necessary).

⁶⁰ Born in 1917, and dying in 1989 (coincidentally, almost exactly the lifespan of the Soviet Union), the songwriter Carlos Puebla began his career in pre-revolutionary Cuba as a *bolero*ista. However, he is remembered as one of the most fervently political, and staunchly revolutionary, songwriters of the nascent and utopian years of the Revolution. His most famous composition – '*Hasta Siempre, Comandante*'; an ode to Che Guevara – has become emblematic of the Revolution specifically, and of new-left affiliation globally⁶⁰. Often his songs would serve as cultural comments written bespoke for the precise actions of the Revolution (such as the song '*Diez Serán*' - 'We'll Get the Ten' about the proposed ten-ton sugar harvest), or sought to make risible Cuba's 'enemies' (as in '*La OEA Me Causa Risa*' and '*Mira Yanki, Como Nos Reímos*')

And so, in short, Cuban remembrance is based on a series of evental moments – the ‘Revolution’ may be considered an event that is indeed a “one-mark of its own multiple” (Badiou, 2006:180) – both a singular concept and a umbrella term for all the myriad events, moments and heroes that constituted it but also on a fidelity – a need to remember – both the event itself, and also its predecessors, the wars of independence, as well as those moments of repression and subjugation that sparked them. It is this remembrance, coagulated into a series of public commemorations (see Aguirre, 1984, 2002) that both serve to define and restrict the parameters of ‘authentically Cuban’ identity expression. It was not only the momentous and the heroic that the Revolution remembered. As the revolutionary project established itself as a socialist endeavour, its leaders also sought to remember ‘the people’. As Quinn writes:

The Marxist agenda also significantly expanded the remit of history to include the study of ‘the exploited classes... and their constant struggles’ (Portuondo, 1963:24): peasants, workers, women and blacks were now considered valid subjects of historical investigation, and their entrance onto the Cuban historical stage was one of the most significant achievements of revolutionary historiography. (Quinn, 2007:383)

Whilst this remembrance of the ‘everyman’ is indeed central to revolutionary Cubanness, placing such figures at the centre of an otherwise evental narrative, peppered with great triumphs and heroic martyrs, seldom serves to represent the *everyday* of these ‘everymen’. Indeed, a growing concern in many contemporary musical critiques (Porno Para Ricardo included) of the ostensibly socialist regime is this disjunct – this lack of remembrance – between those in power extolling the unity of ‘*el pueblo*’ and the lives of those people (Astley, 2012:59). As one brief example, rapper ‘Escuadron Patriota’ raps that:

***Desde sus despachos la realidad no la pueden oler
La tristeza de este país no la van a comprender***

They can’t smell reality from their offices
The sadness of this country they can’t understand

These impassioned lines paint a picture of a growing concern among many Cubans at the inability of this grand narrative – replete though it may be with depictions of the ‘everyman’ Cuban – and the remembrances that impact upon a lived contemporary Cuban identity.

The traumatic crises of the Special Period⁶¹ (discussed below) have brought a “significant renovation of Cuban historiography” (Quinn, 2007:395), and a re-evaluation of the grand

⁶¹ The Special Period is the name given to the time of crisis, near-famine, scarcity in all areas of life, and another vast and traumatic exodus of rafters across the Straits of Florida that began with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 and continued throughout the early-to-mid 90s.

narrative and great men of national identity. Thus *Porno Para Ricardo* represent just one example of a trend for redefining Cubanness along more grounded quotidian lines. Yet, despite (or because of) the weakening of the revolutionary narrative in light of political and economic concessions, the narrative of ‘evental moments’ that both break from yet somehow continue the narrative still pervades much of Cuban consciousness. In Louis Perez description of the Special Period as “one of those temporal divides” around which the “momentous transitions of a historical epoch” between a cleaved and separated “‘before’ and ‘after’” are made (Perez, 2006:xi), Cuban identity is tossed on the tide of the momentous; lurching between drastic and necessary redefinition, remembered (or forgotten) in large slabs of ‘History’. Even in the most personally impacting moments of Cuban history, there still seems to be a sense of the momentous permeating the narrative and confining a sense of Cuban history (and thus identity) to the somewhat impersonal (albeit personified) grand narratives.

As Tim Edensor notes, this conception of national identity remembered and constructed through the annals of a ‘National History’ – in a constellation of specific, grand points of remembrance – can tend to become engrained and enmeshed into a ‘culture’, one that allows for little scope outside of its boundaries:

[Ernest Gellner discusses the notion of “cultures”,] referred to as ‘garden cultures’ (Gellner, 1983:7), which are presumably surveyed, tended and codified by specialist experts. Thus a mass education system binds the state and culture together, canons are devised, museums are established, official histories are written... so that specific bodies of knowledge, values and norms are ingested by all educated citizens (Edensor, 2002:3).

Inherent in this conception of the ‘garden culture’ is not only the notion of deliberate tending and selecting of certain point of remembrance (to a particular end), but also the notion of a barrier; a wall which signals the edge of the garden, disallowing what grows outside. Such a formulation is evoked in the continued significance of Fidel Castro’s famous dichotomising maxim positioning everything either “within” or “outside” the Revolution. A space of canonical and highly organised remembrances of Cuba is outlined. Sites of remembrance are made shrines in which, through which, one must learn what it means to be Cuban. It is precisely this kind of rhetoric of remembrance that *Porno Para Ricardo*, and many other young Cubans, find anachronistic and unrepresentative (in their exclusivity) of a contemporary Cubanness. Remembrance becomes the nation, becomes identity. As Edensor notes, such a garden of remembrance tends towards rigidity, leading often to a lack of meaning:

The meaning of the symbolic cultural elements cannot be determined or fixed. In fact, particularly powerful symbols need to be flexible in order to retain their

relevance over time and their appeal amongst diverse groups. As Guibernau says, “symbols not only stand for or represent something else, they also allow those who employ them to supply part of their meaning” (Guibernau, 1996:81, in Edensor, 2002:5).

This is precisely the concern that Porno Para Ricardo are expressing in their ‘alternative’ remembrances; a feeling of obsolescence surrounding the supposedly emblematic moments of remembrance that constitute the national identity; events that are known by rote repetition, but which seem to pertain little to the course of the everyday, and are of little use in making sense of that everyday. As such, the events of the Revolution become, to many young Cubans, a series of moments that, because of their fixedness, fail to maintain such a relevance, as they are unable to be reinterpreted as a way of making sense of the present. The inadequacy of relying solely upon the remembrance of the ‘grand narrative’, the heroic event, as the foundation for a national identity is again highlighted by Edensor, in his assessment of Anthony Smith’s work:

The emphasis in [Smith’s] work continues to be on the historical and the traditional and official. For instance, he asserts that “national symbols, customs and ceremonies are the most potent and durable aspects of nationalism. They embody its basic concepts, making them visible and distinct for every member” (1991:77). This stress on the obviously identifiable, tangible, spectacular cultural effects obfuscates the everyday, taken for granted, cultural commonsensical practices as well as the popular forms circulated in a mass culture (2002:9).

As Catherine Moses notes, such official ceremonies of remembrance in Cuba have become mandatory spaces in which to ‘keep up appearances’; a space not of remembering and reconfirming a national identity, but where those “within the system who no longer believe” (2000:14) can allay the suspicions of rebellion and dissidence that may befall them by non-attendance.

Then if not in the grand gesture and the hero, perhaps it is in the everyday that Cuban identity is performed, repeated, confirmed, reclaimed and redefined. Perhaps it is in the familial, private sphere, rather than in the public sphere, that Cubans truly express themselves. Such an assertion is made by Antoni Kapcia in noting that attendance at public rallies diminished as Special Period Cubans retreated more into the realm of the private and the sphere of the family (2005). Suchlicki concurs in his assessment that the so-called “new man” of Cuba – dedicated to this public sphere and grand narrative of remembrance – is “nowhere to be found” (2000:57). Perhaps Cuban identity is to be found at the domino table, in the ration shop queue, around the television, in the catchphrase of a *radionovela*, and other such sites of the repeated everyday.

The process of relocating national identity away from the evental and towards a more mundane everyday is described by Michael Billig as ‘banal nationalism’. For the “daily reproductions” of national identity to occur, “a whole complex of beliefs, assumptions, habits, representations and practices must also be reproduced. Moreover, this complex must be reproduced in a banally mundane way, for the world of nations is the everyday world” (1995:6). Billig uses the metaphor of an ‘unwaved flag’ of national identity to describe this quotidian reproduction and representation; the place of “the numerous signifiers and reminders of the nation that form part of everyday spaces, routines and practices, as opposed to that which is wielded during overt displays of nationalism” (Edensor, 2002:11). Such a model provides something of an antithesis to the revolutionary grand narrative that asserts the sites of the spectacular⁶² are where national identity resides. By asserting that ‘remembrance’ of a national identity is a process of continued unfurling, the conception of the ‘unwaved flag’ suggests that we are always already engaged in the act of remembrance by operating within the everyday, and are thus constantly engaged in the nuanced repetition and redefinition of national identity; not as a traumatic and crunching sea change, which demands a process of forgetting as much as remembering, but one that is constantly, imperceptibly, moulding the past to make sense of the present. As David Sutton notes, memories are “formed as an interaction between the past and the present” (2001:9), and the ‘unwaved flag’ defines the construction of national identity along much the same lines.

‘Te Acuerdas De...’ – Examples of Unwaved Flags

In one particularly overt set of remembrances – the song ‘*Te Acuerdas de...*’ (‘Do You Remember...’) – Porno Para Ricardo fly this ‘unwaved flag’ of Cuban identity – relocating the remembrance of Cubanness away from the grand (mythologised) events, and towards the personally remembered and quotidian.

The verses adopt a call and response device, Gorki asking if ‘you’ remember a certain moment, place or object, to which the band, in unison, respond, imbuing the memory with its contemporary significance. In this narrative device, as well as staging a reminiscent conversation among the band members, Gorki is also talking directly to his audience, asking them to remember certain specific elements from *their own past* as a gateway to access and identify with the memories of the band. The repetitive lyrical device utilised (each pair

⁶² Or rather, the mundane sites which are *made spectacular* by heroic, revolutionary acts. One example might be the otherwise everyday train tracks in Santa Clara which, when blown up by Che Guevara’s brigade on the 29th of December, 1958, signalled the beginning of the end of the conflict, and is thus now a commemorative site of remembrance.

of lines beginning with ‘*te acuerdas de...*’ ‘do you remember...’), and often the superficiality of the things remembered, brings to mind the similar device used by Joe Brainard in ‘I Remember’ (1970). In both works, remembrances flit from the familiar to the familial, from the personal to the potentially unifiable. Though while Brainard prefixes each remembrance with the personal ‘I’, encouraging the reader to remember his/her own personal memories in place of the specific original, Gorki prefixes his remembrances with ‘you’. At times this takes on an accusatory, interrogative, tone - ‘do *you* remember this...’ (if not, why not?) – that appears to almost question the authenticity of the listener, their ‘right’ to the term ‘Cuban’ as part of *their* identity. In other places, it creates a desire for a reconstructed collective remembrance located in the everyday and the personal:

*¿Te acuerdas de los muñequitos?
Los que ponían to’ los días igualitos.
¿Te acuerdas de nuestra merienda?
La mantequilla y los panes cangrejitos*

‘Do you remember the cartoons?
They put on exactly the same ones every day’
‘Do you remember our afternoon snacks?
Butter with ‘*cangrejito*’ breads’⁶³

The primary school snacks, the cartoons on television⁶⁴ are memories shared by a generation. These memories are designed to foster a sort of pan-generational identity; to assert that there are some characteristics upon which, or through which, Cubans can find some notion of a shared past and comparable present. As prevalent as the inquisitive (interrogative) second person of each opening line, is the unifying use of the possessive first person plural. Gorki refers to “*nuestro dinero*”, “*nuestros maestros*” and “*nuestras jevitas*” (*our* money, *our* teachers, *our* girlfriends), establishing a colloquial tone of conversation directly with the ‘you’ listening, but also alluding to a larger collective (*our* generation’).

The goal here is to foster some sort of collective past, one which Porno Para Ricardo, by establishing themselves as the ones remembering, can become authors of, and thus owners of. They demonstrate here both their knowledge of, and belonging within, Cuban culture: they remember being Cuban. This lyrical device is used not only to allow the band ‘back into the fold’ of Cuban discourse; to renegotiate the stigma of being branded ‘political dissidents’ and the isolation that engulfs the band since their expulsion from the ‘*Asociación Hermanos Saiz*’⁶⁵, to demonstrate just how readily they and their lyrics fit within

⁶³ All Porno Para Ricardo lyrics presented here taken from the band’s website www.pornopararicardo.org, and translated by the author. Full lyrics to all songs discussed appear in the appendix.

⁶⁴ An analysis of a specific remembrance of these cartoons is reserved for Chapter Four, as Porno Para Ricardo perform a punk cover version of a Soviet cartoon theme song.

⁶⁵ The band’s contestations with the AHS are discussed in Chapters Three and Five.

contemporary Cuban society. This collectivising conversation – this communal remembrance - serves to outline a space around which Cubans can gravitate and find remembrances of themselves. The space of Cuban history and what is remembered is reclaimed by the band. No solemn request to remember any of the stately acts of the Revolution, nor its social and political struggles and goals. These are points of collective remembrance Carlos Puebla makes integral to *his* Cuban remembrances. By replacing the remembrances of Cuban identity into the personal and the everyday, Porno Para Ricardo reform a space of identity around which Cubans may find themselves.

The generational remembrances of ‘*Te Acuerdas de...*’ ‘grow up’ with the listener almost, as in the second verse, Gorki asks this newly established definition of ‘his generation’ to remember their ‘real’ teachers (as opposed to the ones teaching in school today) and ‘their’ girlfriends. Though both these remembrances have a distinctly contemporary political message, speaking specifically of modern Cuban society and the social problems therein - a perceived drop in education standards, and the social acceptability of *jineterismo*⁶⁶ – as significant is the desire to create a collectivising narrative of ‘growing up’. From the cartoons and afternoon snacks of verse one, to the girlfriends and high-school relations of verse two, Porno Para Ricardo are mapping out a quotidian Cuban identity. It is in this relocation of the Cuban identity that brings to mind Michael Billig’s notion of the “unwaved flag” of national identity construction, in which “the whole complex of beliefs, assumptions, habits, representations and practices’ (1995:6) which (re)produce national identity are reproduced in the banal realm of the everyday” (Tim Edensor, 2002:11). Porno Para Ricardo are attempting to forge a communal identity based on the recognition and applicability of certain quotidian memories, and in doing so present themselves as one of the myriad authors of this potentially collective space of identity, which is dependent on ‘Cubanness’ as a tool for comprehension.

Yet in all this plaintive-comedic remembrance of the erstwhile everyday, this nostalgia for childhood, youth and the quotidian, the chorus drags these benign memories into the present, giving them meaning and making sense of them, making them crucial, making them important:

**y todo eso se ha perdido porque estamos’ en comunismo
y todo eso se ha perdido porque estamos construyendo**

⁶⁶ The term ‘*jineterismo*’ describes a process still occurring in Cuba today, but particularly prevalent in the Special Period, where Cuban women (and, to a lesser extent, men) would be ‘companions’ for tourists in return for food, clothes, money, or trips to otherwise prohibited clubs, hotels etc. The singer-songwriter Pedro Luis Ferrer sings a searingly beautiful lament to one such *jinetera* in his song ‘*Marucha la Jinetera*’ (1994).

**y todo eso lo perdimos porque estamos avanzando....
De cabeza pa'l abismo.**

And all this has been lost because we are in communism
And all this has been lost because we are constructing
And all of this has been lost because we are advancing...
Heading for the abyss

The paradox Porno Para Ricardo address here of loss and waste in the face of construction and progression is telling. It is given an even more pertinent nuance by the dearth of material goods within Cuba – where obsolete goods are re-patched, repaired and reused ad infinitum. What is lost, then, in this strive for progression - what is wasted - is not material goods, but memory, and with it identity. Such a refrain adds another layer of significance to the band's list of everyday memories. These 'unwaved flags' become not only a series of more or less benign sites of national identity, but contested sites of remembrance in need of preservation. Remembrance of things forgotten becomes a way of representing a contemporary identity, for as Walter Benjamin asserts "every image of the past that is not recognised by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably" (1982:257). In reclaiming what has been lost from the national narrative, Porno Para Ricardo are both augmenting the national identity in the present – supplementing it by adding in new sites where identity may be located – but are also stitching together epochs of Cuba's fractious history to present them as coterminous; indeed overlapping. They are asserting that things forgotten, even moments perhaps best forgotten, are still of contemporary concern within Cuba. In the following sections, I will address two case studies of this manner of remembrance in the band's work, examples in which 'forgotten' aspects of the past are made relevant to the present, made integral in understanding and contextualising that present, and reintegrated back into the definition of Cuban identity.

Remembrance of the Forgotten/ Understanding the Present

When one of the books which were the joy of our childhood, which we have not opened since, falls into our hands, it is not without a certain curiosity, an anticipation of a recurrence of memories and a kind of interior rejuvenation that we begin to read it. Just be thinking about it we believe that we can recall the mental state in which we found ourselves at that time... We therefore hope by reading the book again to complete the former vague memory and so to relive the memory of our childhood.

But what happens most frequently is that we actually seem to be reading a new book, or at least an altered version. The book seems to lack pages, developments, or details that were there when we first read it; at the same time, additions seem to have been made because our interest is now attracted to and our reflections focussed on a number of aspects of the action... we were incapable of noticing then (Maurice Halbwachs, 1992:46).

Halbwachs' eloquent example of a book remembered from childhood perceived differently in the present speaks precisely to this simple, yet pertinent, point that memories do not exist exclusively preserved in the past in pristine and unchanging form; they are managed, manipulated and mediated through the ever changing prism of the present. As David Sutton argues "memories are not simply stored images drawn out of the brain at appropriate intervals, but are very much formed as an interaction between the past and the present" (2001:9). This is perhaps one primary concern in *Porno Para Ricardo*'s concern over the 'forgetting' of elements of the past in the wake of progress to the future; that a distinct schism is forged socially and culturally between this past and present; that the two are made to stand as separate epochs, not impinging upon one another. Memories of childhood, locations where alternative cultural identities could be constructed (now derelict sites) and previous economic circumstances are all rendered unimportant in making sense of the present by the process of forgetting.

In other examples of *Porno Para Ricardo*'s use of memory and remembrance, one can detect a distinct desire to 'connect' these moments of the past often forgotten. As noted in the introduction, if their lyrics claim to voice "what many people think but are incapable of expressing because of fear" (MLC, 2008), then perhaps one channel through which this goal is achieved is by *remembering* what others dare not. These remembrances of forgotten (or forbidden) aspects of Cuban history don't necessarily fall under the category of 'unwavering flags' of national identity, although the construction of an identity is central to these acts of remembrance. Rather they fulfil a slightly different need; that of connecting together these fragments of Cuban history into a holistic history. This threading together of fractured epochs and remembrance of the forgotten serves both to paint a fuller picture of Cuban history and identity construction, but also serves as a tool to make better sense of the present. By connecting past and present, they are making sense of both; demonstrating the inextricable links between the two, links that affect and mould impressions in a two-way dialogue. As Paul Connerton notes, lines of connection between 'the past' and 'the present' tend to run both ways:

Our experience of the present very largely depends upon our knowledge of the past. We experience our present world in a context which is causally connected with past events and objects... Hence the difficulty of extracting our past from our present: not simply because present factors tend to influence – some might want to say distort – our recollections of the past, but also because past factors tend to influence, or distort, our experience of the present (Connerton, 1989:2).

The two case studies below examine first the remembrances of images of the Soviet Union in the band's work, and secondly look at a more focussed study of a song addressing the

*balseros*⁶⁷ (rafters), that most striking symbol of the Special Period. In both these cases, memories of aspects of Cuba's past tainted by political failure, moments wished to be forgotten, are evoked as a way to broaden the dialogue between past and present, and to better comprehend the problems of the present, and to better affect change.

But if the goal in these remembrances is to expand upon the palette of the past from which to understand the present, then issues of identity, both national and individual, are, once more, central concerns. As Michael Lambek and Paul Antze note, "identity is not composed of a fixed set of memories but lies in the dialectical, ceaseless activity of remembering and forgetting, assimilating and discarding" (1998:xxix). Part of *Porno Para Ricardo*'s consternation in the forgetting of the past is precisely that it is *their past*; their own individual memories of childhood that are being forgotten, and thus excised from the collective space of Cuban identity. The remembrances below both reclaim and reassert an individual identity. They make pertinent this past to a construction of personal identity in the present, but by doing so seek to augment the space of Cuban identity by adding back in memories otherwise forgotten.

Reflections of Russia, Remembrances of Childhood

One of the most poetic (and often cited) quotes on memory and the past comes in the opening lines of L.P. Hartley's novel 'The Go-Between' (1953), in which the narrator surmises that "the past is a foreign country: they do things differently there". In the case of *Porno Para Ricardo*, and indeed for all Cubans of their generation, a significant part of their past, in the form of cultural products, language, food and electronic goods, came literally from a different – and now extinct – country, a place where they did things differently: The Soviet Union. As noted in the introduction, the tumult of the Special Period led to a severe reduction in the standing of Soviet culture as a legitimate constituent element in the space of Cuban cultural identity. However references to the erstwhile ally appear to have become something of an *idée fixe* for *Porno Para Ricardo*; they repeatedly seem to remember the destruction, use, and re-use of the Soviet Union and the imports that were such an integral part of 70s and 80s Cuban culture. In short they are determined to remember this aspect of Cuba's history. A more specific musical example of the band's treatment of imported Soviet culture will be addressed in Chapter Four through analysis of

⁶⁷ Although this song does not make an overt reference to being located temporally in the Special Period, and could easily recount the story of an imaginary rafter from the present, I think the use of the word *balsa* (raft) necessarily has Special Period connotations. Even so, the songs use of memory to address a traumatic collective memory such as migration fulfils many of the same goals; that is remembrance of the forgotten to better define a contemporary identity.

their cover of a Soviet cartoon theme song, examining what such ironic/nostalgic appropriations may suggest about the band's identity. Here I wish to detail some of the non-musical remembrances of Cuba's Soviet inflected, pre-Special Period past to assert the re-remembrance of excluded aspects of Cuban history and identity within the band's work.

Artwork

The faded red flag is the kernel around which much of Porno Para Ricardo's image is based⁶⁸. Their band (banned) logo – a hammer-and-sickle-made-phallic on red background with faux-Cyrillic lettering speaks of a denigration of the Soviet legacy, but an insistence upon remembering it, of dredging forgotten imagery back out into the light to reassess them more fully, and to reassert them as part of the space of Cuban identity.

This image of the phallic hammer-and sickle is a complex one to decipher. The more politically sensitive setting of Cuba notwithstanding, it is clearly intended to be humorous, juvenile even; a crude sketch in the back of a school exercise book. Yet in its debasing of such an erstwhile symbol of noble political struggle, and of the 'everyman' (the hammer and sickle the tools of the Soviet farmer, whose cause the Soviet Revolution sought to champion) there is a potent political critique. Perhaps it would be going too far to suggest that Porno Para Ricardo are replacing imposed symbols of the 'everyday' of Russia (the hammer and sickle) for an ironic representation of the supposed essential 'tools' of the 'everyman' in Cuba; certainly the island's identity as hedonistic, licentious paradise was an identity projected upon it by US imagination (Perez 1999:202). Echoes of that 'exotic' past, as noted above, were played out in post-Soviet Union Cuba as the state turned a blind eye as many Cubans resorted to *jinetismo* with foreign tourists as a means of survival.

What is obvious is that, aside from the barbed and multilayered political commentary that this phallic symbol represents, it is also about remembering a symbol forgotten and excised from the narrative of Cuban identity. Enforced upon the band in their childhood as a symbol of an ally, as an emblem of the ideology surrounding Cubanness, it has long ceased to find representation on the billboards and political rhetoric of the island. Perhaps Porno Para Ricardo's insistence upon remembering this anachronistic symbol of Soviet legacy serves as something of a counterweight to the concept of the 'unwaved flag' constantly moulding and redefining national identity through the everyday. Perhaps in its (albeit modified) resurrection, the band are demonstrating the danger of forgetting. They insist

⁶⁸ The faded Red Flag is the name of Porno Para Ricardo's fourth studio album, but has appeared as part of their artwork since the band's beginnings. See appendix.

upon remembering something that was made to mean something to them in childhood, that has impinged (however unwantedly) upon their memories of youth and thus, from a personal, rather than a political aspect, is still of some relevance to contemporary Cuba. Perhaps they are demonstrating a mode of remembrance which doesn't splinter under the pressure of its own rigidity; that can recontextualise and warp old symbols to new meanings, rather than forget them completely.

Destroying a Russian Guitar

In the nascent days of Porno Para Ricardo's career, when the band were permitted to perform live, Gorki would frequently engage in a quite visceral act of remembrance through the 'auto-destructive performance art' of smashing Russian electric guitars at the end of the show. As discussed in the conclusion of the thesis, this penchant for destruction has revisited the band's work in recent times, as the encore to their recent live show in Prague. However, the nationality of the destroyed guitar had changed. Gorki speaks candidly about his recollections of destroying specifically *Russian* guitars on stage, and act which constituted a regular part of the band's live repertoire⁶⁹:

The most enjoyable parts [of performing live] were the breaking of guitars because we gave a meaning to breaking a guitar – that is the Russian guitar. In rock music you break a guitar with the intention of an exorcism, or as a catharsis, but we gave it a local meaning for our country that is to break with Russian colonialism (Gorki, 2010).

A "local meaning" that contests both the non-localness of the instrument and the route it took in making its way to the island. A symbolic representation of the Soviet Union can be read into this performance as – night after night – Gorki would make physical not only the destruction of 'Russia', but also the inevitable severing of enforced political and essential economic ties between the two nations.

But this act does more than just *represent* the actual collapse, it converts in into art, makes it personal. Laura García Freyre suggests that "Gorki Águila broke Russian guitars as a way to break with the past" (2008a:550) and Gorki's choice of words in expressing this act – to "break with Russian colonialism" – would tend to bear out such an interpretation. The 'past' here represented is at a 'collective', national level. The cultural, political and economic policies, forged through the 60s, 70s and 80s, that ostensibly bound the two nations inextricably (and unequally) together are invoked in this destructive remembrance. But it is also an individual remembrance, a less grand and more quotidian relationship with the past

⁶⁹ Photos of such an act of destruction from one of the band's early performances can be found in the appendix.

that is being made here. Russian food, electronic products, cars, cartoons, the elements that pepper this generation of Cubans' memories of youth are also recalled. One could suggest that the band are disavowing as illegitimate from inception the presence of Russian culture within the Cuban sphere of *potential* influences, and that the act of destroying a Russian guitar was designed to expunge 'Russia' from the band's collective identity, to render it obsolete, to highlight its perpetual falsehood, to remove it from the melting pot of 'Cubanía'.

While there may be an element of this in the band's destruction, there is, as noted above, a deeper representation of 'Russia' in the band's work. The band seems to keep returning to images of Russia; always parodied, it seems, but never forgotten. Their images of Russia speak of 'remembrance': if not fondness, then recognition of significance. Gorki is 'keeping alive' the memory of his Russian-tinged past in the act of negating it. At least part of the vitriol is aimed at the duplicity that sought to 'write out' Soviet cultural symbols from certain definitions of Cubanness, symbols that have clearly become – however lamentable and unwanted – an integral point on the band's cultural map.

As the impending trauma of Soviet collapse was realised, it was seen as salient to reduce to zero (through the policy of '*zero opción*') imports from the Soviet Union (Betancourt, 1991). However, as the ensuing Special Period unfolded, there appears to have been a move to reduce to nought the *cultural legacy* of Russia in the Cuban identity. For a generation such as Gorki's, who grew up with a wealth of Soviet images, to have them removed in adulthood is an indication of this duplicity, and of a frankly Orwellian rhetoric: these cultural elements 'never having existed'. So the band return to Soviet symbols as a reminder, as an *aide memoire* almost of their collective past. Just as there is an anxiety of 'loss' only at the moment of 'potential capture', so too only when that loss is manifest can one feel the need – the importance - of remembering. In the destruction of the Russian guitar, there is preservation. There exists in this example a paradoxical, yet symbiotic, relationship to the Soviet Union, at once despised yet recognised as integral, destroyed yet preserved, 'alien' yet 'personal'.

Importantly, the references to Soviet culture in Porno Para Ricardo's work are often references to childhood. Their remembrances of 'Russia' – their insistence upon remembering Russia - comes not from the affiliation they feel to the cultural products themselves, nor exclusively from any political motivation to remember a particular political system (either from a critical point of view, in addressing Cuba's overreliance on the Soviet Union, or from a nostalgic perspective of remembering a relatively stable period

economically and politically), though both these elements may be at work here. Most prominently, Porno Para Ricardo's remembrances of Russia are aimed at further augmenting the space of national memory. The official 'forgetting' of the erstwhile Soviet presence in the constitution of a national identity, which effectively writes its presence out of the narrative explaining the issues of contemporary Cuban society, economy and culture, does not synch with the band members' personal recollections of Soviet culture as integral memory points from childhood. To deny the place of Soviet culture in the construction of a contemporary Cuban identity is to deny these constituent elements of childhood. In a sense, it illegitimises these personal remembrance in the construction of an individual Cubanness. In remembering Russia with such a fervent need, Porno Para Ricardo are insisting that such memories, however undesirable they may be, are needed to form a more representational Cuban identity.

'Mi Balsa': Reflections of the Special Period

Porno Para Ricardo make similarly insistent remembrances of aspects of the Special Period in their work. However, these remembrances are not designed to reclaim some 'forgotten moment' of Cuban history. The trauma of the Special Period is still a vivid memory in the construction of Cuban identity, and is scarcely forgettable. In their approach to remembering the Special Period – actually discussing some of the traumatic events from a personal⁷⁰ perspective – perhaps there is an aim to negotiate a way through the cultural traumas of the Special Period; to address the ways in which this trauma has impinged upon the national identity, how it has shaped post-millennial Cuba. As one tool to negotiate a way through this trauma, the band seem to be attempting to reconnect these schismatic epochs of 'before and after' in the Cuban narrative, fragmented and separated by these 'evental' traumas that demand a "new way of being" (Badiou: 2001:42). In reconnecting these fragments, they begin to reshape the contemporary political, economic and social landscape in Cuba, and begin to make sense of some of the more incomprehensible frustrations that inhabit the island. Perhaps they even begin to look beyond the traditional binary options of apathetic acquiescence or migration, to suggest an understanding, built on the renegotiation of the past, and an ability to imagine change in the future.

One song which addresses the trauma of the Special Period is '*Mi Balsa*' ('My Raft'). Although the song does not overtly locate the song as taking place within the Special

⁷⁰ The case study discussed below does not concern the personnel of the band in the personal remembering. Rather it constructs, as do many of Porno Para Ricardo's songs, a protagonist through which these memories are expressed. Thus, the remembrances on display in '*Mi Balsa*' are not 'personal', but by giving them a single voice, they are given back their personality.

Period, the imagery of a lone ‘*balsero*’ (rafter) drifting in the Straits of Florida evokes memories of that particular time. The *balsero* has come to stand as perhaps the most potent symbol of the desperation and loss of the Special Period, and thus its invocation in this song is inescapable, though perhaps its deliberate ‘timelessness’, its positioning outside of a defined epoch (as will be discussed, the protagonist sings from an aquatic hinterland from which borders, times, places and identities are all blurred into indistinguishability) is a telling point, already cementing the connections between this traumatic past, its own progenitors (previous mass migrations), and, crucially, the less dramatic, though constant, rivulet of migration via that most desperate of modes of transport that have come to define part of the Cuban reality and shape the nation’s identity.

The song ‘*Mi Balsa*’ presents itself as something of a faux-power ballad; a parody, perhaps, of that other aquatic tragedy, the (Celine) Dionysian hysteria of ‘My Heart Will Go On’⁷¹. Though rather than the plight of doomed lovers, this song provides us with a solo aria; the last thoughts of a hapless ‘*balsero*’, not lamenting lost love, but cursing the carpenter who built his raft, swimming aimlessly, not knowing whether he is facing towards Miami or Havana:

*El pinche carpintero me timó con esta balsa
me dijo que era buena que flotaba que flotaba,
y ahora que me he roto y mi balsa va pa’l fondo
no sé si estoy nadando pa’ Miami o para el morro.*

That bloody carpenter cheated me with this raft
he said it would be good for floating
and now it has broken and my raft is sinking to the bottom,
and I don’t know if I am swimming towards Miami or ‘*El Morro*’⁷²

Though this narrative is fictional, the subject matter is all too real. The trauma of the Special Period’s “vintage” (Pedraza Bailey, 1985, after Kunz, 1973) of migrants to Miami not only exacerbated the economic and social traumas apparent on the island through the 1990s, but left an indelible imprint upon younger generations of Cubans still living on the island. With a sizable proportion of their cohort leaving Cuba, the ‘generational perception’ of national identity – indeed the very geographical location of such a collective identity, or worse, the *veracity* of such collectivity – was called into question. Such a traumatic exodus, significantly based on generational lines rather than exclusively political ones,⁷³ could be

⁷¹ The *balsero* protagonist does indeed liken his predicament to the sinking of the Titanic in the second verse.

⁷² El Morro is the Havana sea front; interestingly a favoured hang out for young couples (and tourists). See appendix for full lyrics.

⁷³ Pedraza-Bailey (1985) asserts mass-migrations from Cuba that took place in the 1960 were predominantly based upon political opposition to the Revolution, whereas migrations of the 1980s onwards were primarily economically motivated.

described using Cathy Caruth's term "impossible history", a "history which they [the traumatised] cannot entirely possess" (1995:5). There is a sense in which, though the effects of the Special Period maintain their cultural, social and economic pertinence even today for almost all Cubans living within Cuba, it remains something of an 'impossible history'; impossible to quantify, and thus impossible to fully integrate into a *continued* national identity. Thus it is parsed off, self-contained and left mute. The multifarious traumas of the Special Period – significantly demarcated as a 'period', with a definite beginning and, albeit hazy, ending – are something of a spectre in post-millennial Cuba. Not least among these traumas is the topic of mass generational exodus. Cuban migrants are always present as the family members departed, yet they are often left unable (or disallowed) to speak, as those who left are excluded from the identity space of Cubanness, labelled by the Revolution as '*gusanos*' ('worms') and cast out to a space decidedly 'outside the Revolution'. Dori Laub addresses the lingering effect of "not telling" the story of trauma:

The "not telling" of the story serves as perpetuation of its tyranny. The events becomes more and more distorted in their silent retention and pervasively invade and contaminate the survivor's daily life. The longer the story remains untold, the more distorted it becomes in the survivor's conception of it, so much so that the survivor doubts the reality of the actual events (1995:64).

It is precisely the act of telling the untold (or untellable) story that '*Mi Balsa*' engaging in. The protagonist is a *balsero*, one who finds himself adrift and without hope, significantly located in a space 'between' the two geographical places of Miami and Havana; a place in which distinguishing between these two poles is made impossible. The *balsero* seems also to be in between life and death here (the sharks, as the *balsero* himself is all too aware, are circling as the raft sinks, and nightfall, however beautiful, is enveloping). As he reflects upon those left behind – the treacherous carpenter who built the raft – as he dreams of his impossible destination – setting foot upon *Cayo Hueso* ('Key West') – we, the listener, are afforded the opportunity to hear the remembrances of an untellable story, one that could not be heard otherwise. This comedic lament is the story not told. It addresses loss, death, the perilous schism between Miami and Havana and, most importantly, it remembers the Special Period. It remembers the story:

It is essential for this narrative that *could not be articulated* to be *told*, to be *transmitted*, to be *heard*, and hence the importance of endeavours... designed to enable the survivors to bear witness, to enable, that is, the act of bearing witness... to take place (ibid.:69).

This fictional narrative not only stages the remembrance of a trauma, but it allows for the untold story to be heard; it insists upon its telling, and crucially, it makes it a part of the ongoing narrative of Cubanness.

But in these final moments of life, perhaps the *balseiro* reveals some striking clarity. His confusion between Miami and Cuba is not the only melding of anathematic or non-emulsifiable positions that is taking place here. Cuban identity is located, along with the *balseiro*, in distinctly choppy waters; and crucially in waters *between* Havana and Miami. If the Special Period served to expand out the geographical map of Cuban identity to incorporate Miami, and the space between, into narratives of Cubanness, then Porno Para Ricardo's blurring of the distinctions between them – the inability to tell the difference in the moment of the present – speaks of a radical reappraisal of the uses of memory and the place of the past in constructing and reflecting contemporary Cuban identity.

In the *balseiro*'s aimless swimming – circling between his past in Cuba and a dreamt future in Miami – there is something to be speculated about an allegorical blurring of the boundaries between temporal epochs, as well as geographical spaces. The liminality of the protagonist's precarious position is perhaps an allegory for the location 'outside' of conventional (social) space that Porno Para Ricardo find themselves. And perhaps it is a position that allows (demands) that longed-for vista "where the schism between *antes* and *después* is softened and the frontier between *dentro* and *fuera* becomes blurred."⁷⁴ Perhaps the consternation here is with the narratives surrounding the Special Period that speak not of the trauma of 'passing through', but the completion of 'surviving it'. Again, Caruth's notion of the "impossible history" proves apposite in describing an epoch that, though remembered, is projected as 'finished', on the 'other side' of which a "new way of being" (Badiou 2001:42) must be created. Porno Para Ricardo's deliberate positioning outside of a social space attempts to blur the boundaries between these crystalline schisms; these evental moments which demand new definitions and new narratives. This hazy vista, this aimless swimming, helplessly and happily 'outside the Revolution', but also outside of its Other as well, demonstrates the fiction in the metaphor of the historical 'clean break' – and in doing so speaks as much to the fallacy of the Revolution as it does to the 'new Cuba' post-Special Period. The effects of 'what came before' linger on into the 'new' present, necessarily permeating any attempted "new way of being", impinging upon it, defining it. As Paul Connerton notes, past and present have a dialogic relationship, imparting significance upon, and shaping, one another inextricably (1989:2). Porno Para Ricardo's remembrances of the Special Period serve to bridge this evental schism, to show the lingering presence of this past – the 'on-goingness', as it were – in the narrative of Cuban identity.

⁷⁴ '*Antes*' before, '*después*' after, '*dentro*', inside, and '*fuera*', outside. Stephen Fay:
<http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/splas/research/pgforum/pgresearchinterests.aspx>

Such a blurring of boundaries serves not only to problematise conceptions of both past and present, to meld both into one gigantic and inseparable mass of entire history. Rather, Porno Para Ricardo are attempting to make *sense* of what can often seem like an incomprehensible present; frustratingly reticent to change, recalcitrant, and simultaneously desperate to remember, yet equally determined to forget, moments and memories from its own past, irrespective of the cockeyed and partisan projection of the present that this selective remembrance provides. Porno Para Ricardo's remembrances of the Special Period – their blurring of the beginnings of new narratives – demonstrate the need to remember these moments *as part of the construction of the present* and, in that capacity, as relevant players in determining a path for the future.

Finally, and amidst all this seriousness of blurred vistas, death, trauma, remembrance and loss, it is perhaps important to remember the humour in Porno Para Ricardo's remembrances. There is a distinct comedic strand in their remembrance of the Special Period, equally present in their memories of the Soviet presence. The place specifically of *laughter* (and not necessarily 'comedy') will be addressed in greater detail in Chapter Five of this work, but it is important to at least note the humour that accompanies the band's remembrances of often traumatic moments. In '*Mi Balsa*', even as the sharks close in, the protagonist finds time to worry that the first thing they'll eat are his *cojones*. Of course, and if such a thing is not oxymoronic (or just moronic), this is something of a 'serious comedy', aimed not to belittle or make light of the subject matter, but to somehow reclaim it from the realm of the inhuman, the domain of the 'great tragedy' and the solemn pages of the history books, and to wrestle it back into the realm of the quotidian, the personal vignette, the human. Once more, the demand is to remove the discourse of clunking shifts of epoch so familiar to the 'grand narrative' of the Revolution, and relocated national identity in the everyday; to replant the unwaved flags of a popular memory as the markers of Cubanness.

The necessity to laugh at the traumatic is not a device exclusive to the Cuban condition, but as a pre-shadow to Chapter Five, I cite Cuban blogger Yoani Sanchez's words on the importance of laughter in Cuba:

Laughter, banter, kidding around have been group therapy on this island where the frustration and dissatisfaction is exorcised by humour. We laugh at ourselves, and that's healthy... In short, what makes us roar with laughter would make us cry, if we couldn't find a way to joke about it. (Sanchez, 2010)

In Porno Para Ricardo's comedic representation of such a singular story – one voice among the thousands who made that treacherous crossing in the Special Period (and before, and after) – in their ability to joke about that which would otherwise make us cry,

we are given a reading of a past that is inseparable from the present; and one that exists in the realm of the popular. In the swimming-sinking tragicomic lament of this *balsem*, perhaps we are afforded an epitaph, as Tara Brabazon eloquently puts it, “for the groups who... leave... only the residue of laughter, pain and pleasure captured through and by popular culture”, and an alternative to, and remedy for, “the hardened faces of the past [who] stare down the alternative stories and images that are lost to us” (2005:71).

Chapter Two: Places

“vámonos pa’ G que no hay nada que hacer”

* * *

We are sitting in a bar eating soup. Gorki looks exhausted, Laura even more so. Gorki has been recounting some of his anecdotes since last we met; signing albums for lines of elderly Miami-Cubans (his most numerous ‘fans’ in the US), meeting Stephen Stills and being told to ‘relax’ (as a command rather than a suggestion) by Jeff Beck’s authoritative security guard. Gorki rubs his face with both hands and takes a sip of Czech beer, and tells us of working in his sister’s restaurant in Xalapa. Though many of these stories are humorous, and Gorki tells them with verve (and plenty of swearing), many begin with “we were tired” or “we had just arrived, carrying all our luggage” and deal with miscommunication, misunderstanding and agitation.

Only when we begin to talk of Cuba does Gorki become truly animated. He swallows the remaining beer and begins to detail the exact specifications of the now completed home recording studio⁷⁵; the vibration-absorbing rubber, the ‘room-within-a-room’ construction, the absolute sound-proofing. The numerous types of wood and their properties are all of integral importance to Gorki. He then tells of Ciro’s endeavours to start their proposed record label⁷⁶ and of his desire to join him in setting up the label when he returns to Cuba. When I ask him when that may be, he laughs. “Well, that’s a very good question!”

Introduction: Naming Places in Song

Porno Para Ricardo’s more nuanced, everyday remembrances seek to contest the often tacitly assumed notions of national identity constructed within Cuba. In another aspect of their work, their relationship to geographical places within the island, one might also detect a paradoxical punk process of both critiquing and claiming for themselves yet another aspect of Cuban identity. In more ‘authentically Cuban’ national narratives, a somewhat essentialised relationship between place and national identity is outlined. The identity of a place often becomes a placed identity. Certain sites are described as ‘birth places’, the homes of particular cultural, political and social symbols of the nation. They become sites where aspects of an identity are found, where one must go – either physically or through homage – to represent that identity, where one must *be from* in order to express that identity accurately and authentically. In the case of Cuba, where an emphasis on autochthonous

⁷⁵ When I visited Gorki in May 2010, he was overseeing the delivery of timber to refurbish the studio, a process he felt sure would attract the attention of, and eventually reprimands from, the ever-watchful authorities (see introduction). When I visited in 2012 (see part three of this conclusion), the studio was fully operational, and had been used to record the band’s most recent album, *‘Maleconazo Ahora’*.

⁷⁶ Again, this was a proposed idea back in May 2010 (see interview), now fully realised.

invention is central to the image conceived by the Revolution of Cuban cultural identity⁷⁷, place has become a powerful marker of an ‘authentic’ Cuban identity. Cubanness is placed, located and given a home, and thus to seek to claim the identity is often to claim its geographical places as an integral part of an individual identity. A conversation is played out between place, identity, authenticity and music. Each serves to define the others and is, in turn, defined by them. Such a mutual reinforcement leads to a common rhetoric prevalent in Cuba today which implies that to be from Cuba is to recognise the importance of the geographical in the construction of that identity. As a result, not only are numerous places within Cuba imbued with a specific status on the cultural map of the nation’s identity⁷⁸, but they are also paid homage in countless lyrics that extol their natural beauty, their everyday, or their cultural significance. Often, the result is a further cementation of the cultural significance of the place on the map of Cuban identity; a further authentication of physical place as representative symbol of national identity.

References to physical locations abound in Porno Para Ricardo’s lyrics. They map a locality, and in doing so reveal the importance of such a locality upon the identity of the band and their music. In this sense they share with more ‘traditional’ forms of Cuban music a trait of referencing specific geographical place as something of a means of ‘dual authentication’ – where musician references/authenticates place in song, and place serves to authenticate musician. The importance of place becomes apparent through reference in song. Place is important enough to make the subject, and in so doing, the place in question is given further cultural significance. Thus a mutually reinforcing dialectic (rife with concepts of authenticity) between identity and place is established, where each impacts upon and informs the other. In part at least, Porno Para Ricardo’s naming of specific locations – almost all within the city of Havana – ties the band and their identity to Cuba, giving the band an authenticity to speak to contemporary Cuban issues, but also makes their identity a constituent part of the cultural map of Cuba, placing the band within the matrix of Cuban identity, in much the same way that traditional music, with their adulated birth places, do.

However, as Sara Cohen points out, “the production of national or other place-bound identities is always a contested process” (Cohen, 1995:441), and the points on Porno Para Ricardo’s map of *their* Cuban identity serve to contest many aspects and assumptions of

⁷⁷ Although, as will be discussed below, such conceptions of the Cuban identity stretch further back than the Revolution. See Perez, 1999, Robin Moore, 1997, 2006, Kapcia, 1982, 2005.

⁷⁸ Matanzas, Santiago de Cuba and the province of Oriente are given credit as the birth places of three of the island’s ‘indigenous’ musical genres; rumba, conga and son respectively.

this established model of placed Cubanness. Their places are much less mutually beneficial, and more critical, both of the hegemonic power structure that may seek to disallow (through overt censorship in some cases) the incorporation of these newly proposed ‘sites of Cubanness’ into a wider definition, and of the very discourse of ‘belonging’ to these always already authentic sites. Cohen goes on to propose a “view of music and place not as fixed and bounded texts or entities but as social practices involving relationships between people, sounds, images, artefacts, and the material environment” (Cohen, 1995:438), and in *Porno Para Ricardo*’s active, worked for niches of social interaction, musical performance and overt defiance of state hegemony, one can perhaps find examples of this more malleable, more proactive sense of place as integral to conceptions of music, authenticity and identity.

Two places in particular emerge as crucial to *Porno Para Ricardo*’s conception of Cuban identity, yet they are addressed in significantly different ways. The first is the erstwhile epicentre of Cuba’s alternative music scene, the now defunct rock venue ‘*El Patio de María*’; a venue where *Porno Para Ricardo* would regularly perform. Several songs reference the place in lyrics, and one is presented as (ostensibly) a live performance recorded at ‘*El Patio*’. The second place is (arguably) the successor to ‘*El Patio*’s’ throne. ‘*Parque G*’, a park located on the corner of 23 and G in the *Plaza de la Revolución* district of Havana, has become a location of prime importance for Havana’s *frikis* to congregate. Again, it becomes an important referent in a number of songs, and (again ostensibly) one between-song skit is presented as a live recording (albeit hyperbolically represented) from the park itself.

In the repeated references to these two places – one remembered, one reclaimed – perhaps *Porno Para Ricardo* are drawing a similar map of a placed identity; cementing the significance of Cuba upon their identity, whilst simultaneously asserting the place of their identity within Cuba. This is certainly partly true, however, through their punk parody of the established authenticity of *friki* places such as *Parque G*, and in their critical observation of the closing of ‘*El Patio de María*’, *Porno Para Ricardo* are entering into a more complex negotiation with place; at once demonstrating their intimate knowledge of specific locations, demanding their right to claim these places as their own (and thus make place integral to their identity, and their identity integral to place), and recognising the necessity of using place as a lens through which to make sense of their music. Yet simultaneously, they critique the notion of established authenticity that may be ‘tapped into’ by adulating/staking a claim to certain places. Theirs is a Cuban identity that recognises the importance of place. But their places are specific; the worked for niche of personal creation, the place

made authentic in the shaping of identity, but which is wary of the crystallisation of ‘authentic places’, sites where one must go/ must claim to be from in order to present oneself as ‘authentically’ Cuban, or the adulation of places which are somehow always already the sites of Cuban identity. Crucial as place is in the construction of ‘their’ notion of a Cuban identity, it is important as something of a platform from which to perform and disseminate an identity, not as a place where one must go to *find* that identity, fully formed and demanding of adherence.

Placing the ‘Real’ Cuba

Place, and its links to the construction and identity of music, is given importance in a number of (sonically, temporally and geographically) disparate forms of popular music. Music, as a tool to describe and reflect socio-cultural events, is necessarily bound to place. Certain musics operate within a discourse whereby, it would appear, they are informed and defined by the place in which they are ‘born’; they could not have been made anywhere else (in quite the same way). One crucial way in which this inculcation of place is represented in music is through the reference of place in lyrics⁷⁹. In many cases, in many different genres, place becomes the subject of the song, the referent, the adulated authentic symbol, and made crucial to the musical output. Place becomes the subject of the song, the referent, the adulated authentic symbol, and made crucial to the musical output. However, as Susan Smith’s call that sound in general and music in particular be “integral to the geographical imagination” (1994:238, in Leyshon et al. 1995:423) suggests, perhaps the flow of identity runs the other way. Place does not define music (and, in part, identity), rather music (and the identities attached to it) come to define conceptions – even demarcations – of place. As Leyshon et al. suggest:

Space and place are here presented not simply as sites where or about which music happens to be made, or over which music has diffused, but rather different spatialities are suggested as being formative of the sounding and resounding of music. Such a richer sense of geography highlights the spatiality of music and the mutually generative relations of music and place. Space produces as space is produced (1995:424-5).

Geographical places are ‘converted’ into some form of socially significant space, and music becomes a catalytic tool for facilitating such a semiotic change. Music, it seems, is integral in giving cultural *meaning* to place. Martin Stokes’ assertion that “music... do[es] not simply ‘reflect’. Rather, [it] provide[s] the means by which the hierarchies of place are negotiated

⁷⁹ Numerous examples of this practice exist in a wide variety of genres, and to detail even a selection, and examine the relationships between music, identity and place would require a separate study. For the purposes of this broad analysis, I am thinking particularly about the mentioning of specific geographical places within the text of a song.

and transformed... Music does not then simply provide a marker in a prestructured social space, but the means by which this space can be transformed” (1994:4) similarly suggests that music is crucial for imparting an identity upon – indeed *creating* – place, and our perceptions of it. What Stokes’ assertion suggests is that rather than paying deference to pre-existing authentic places in song, musicians naming places may in fact be complicit in the act of creating the authenticity for those same places; they are not reflecting the importance of certain places on the sound and substance of their music, but rather *constructing* the importance of certain places through music.

However, rather than being a ‘one-way flow’ of authentication and identity construction – from either place to identity, or from identity to place – the relationship between music and place is dialogic and mutually beneficial. A multidirectional ‘feedback loop’ is established in the binding of place and identity, as expressed through music. Notions and conceptions of the identity of a place feed and define the music that is made there, and thus can serve to cement, through repetition, the importance of place in the construction of identity. But music is integral in the shaping of those conceptions of place and can, as Stokes suggests, serve to reconfigure and transform the parameters, and even the identity of, place. It is through such loops that placed identities such as the various depictions of ‘placed’ Cuban identity – either the rural national ideal or a recontextualised, contemporary urban Cubanness – are established.

Singing about place has been a constant and significant feature of Cuban music since its inception, covering a wide gamut of the island’s ostensible autochthonous ‘traditional’ genres and, more recently, in hybridised, transnational forms that assimilate rock, hip-hop and other foreign influences to speak to a contemporary Cubanness. Where the former of these ‘placed songs’ may, in part, be engaged in the “obsessional” work of defining a Cuban identity (cf. Kapcia, 2000 and Arango, 1997) as existing – or even ‘being born’ – *within* the geographical confines of the island, the latter may, as Susan Thomas (2010) notes, be attempts to redraw the cultural/spatial/aural maps of Cubanness to include a more disparate musical palette and, in the wake of generational diaspora, cover a much wider geographical space.

Whilst a more nuanced interpretation of these various naming of place would require a long and detailed analysis, and the imagined construction of Cuban identity portrayed as existing in each of these named places might provide a rich and fascinating geographical/cultural map of the island, its self-portrayal and a broader definition of Cuban identity, what connects each of these disparate examples is the desire to locate an origin

point for Cuban identity; to tie it inextricably to place, to make place the progenitor of identity, to make identity autochthonous and indigenous, self-contained and self-defined. However also at work in many of these different invocations of place in song not only a desire to place the authentic Cuban identity, but also to establish some recognisable and tangible sense of authenticity for the musicians themselves. This also creates a sort of mutually beneficial feedback loop of authentication, whereby musicians, by referencing place help to establish and reconfirm the authenticity of the place, but by allying themselves to that notion of an established and 'natural' 'authentic place', the musician becomes imbued with the same authenticity. Thus we see notions of an authentic Cuban identity not only placed, but personified to a certain extent, by the act of naming places in song.

The Rural-Urban Mapping of Cuban Identity

As Susan Thomas rightly points out, the city of Havana has become a dominating referent in the musical-cartographic representations of Cuba in song, to the extent that, she claims, for many musicians "Havana *is* Cuba" (2010:217). It is a trait B.E. Aguirre sees replicated in Cuban national newspaper *Granma* and their coverage of "collective behaviour in Cuba" (1984:543). However, the Havana streets and crumbling *barrios* are by no means the only places offered up as potential locations for the map of Cuban identity. As a running counterweight to the urbanised, Havana-centric depictions of Cuban identity throughout the history of Cuban song, is a pull back to the countryside; the rural landscape and, crucially, the rural archetype personified in the uniquely placed figure of the '*guajiro/a*'.

From Benny Moré's declamation of rural loyalty '*yo sí soy guajiro de verdad*' (I am truly a guajiro) to "Guantanamera", a song that "is undoubtedly the most popular song to emerge from Cuba... and has become a sort of icon of Cuban popular culture" (Manuel, 2006:121-2), rural places, and the figures of the guajiro/a, have become powerfully placed images of a Cuban identity, at once nostalgic, yet contemporarily relevant, through many epochs of Cuban history, as a symbol of geographic, cultural and political autochthony; an identity necessarily tied to places unmistakably Cuban.

Guajiro/a has come to describe and embody something of a national archetype for Cuba. As Tim Edensor notes, this embodying of 'the nation' into the idealised persona of rural life is far from unique to Cuba:

it is difficult to mention a nation without conjuring up a particular rural landscape (often with particular kinds of people carrying out certain actions)... These specific landscapes are selective shorthand for these nations, synecdoches through which they are recognised globally. (Edensor, 2002:39-40)

If we are to take Edensor's notion of the rural synecdoche for the nation, then in many Cuban songs, the vista imagined is that of red earth and olive green foliage, the mountains of the *Sierra Maestra*⁸⁰, sugar and tobacco plantations⁸¹. The figure inhabiting this vista is the *guajiro*; virtuous, hard-working, machete, cigar, thick black moustache, battered cowboy hat, atop a horse. This definitely (defiantly) placed identity finds form in other Cuban cultural products. The immensely popular cartoon Elpidio Valdés, detailing the exploits of the eponymous *mambí* in the war against the Spanish, not only celebrates the rural image of Cubanness, but also sets up something of a historical continuum of Cuban identity as existing within this rural environment, one closely associated with nationalism, a mistrust (even ridicule) of more powerful foreign interest, and a love of Cuban culture.

But, as Peter Manuel notes of the ostensibly archetypal rural soundscape of the *guajira-son* genre (of which 'Guantanamera' is an example), the "bucolic texts which typically romanticized peasant life and the countryside" were often "a thoroughly urban and modern entity, composed, performed, and enjoyed by city-dwellers" (2006:123). Perhaps even these rurally placed constructions of Cuban identity were images of Havana; points on the urban map of Cubanness?

This urban reference to the rural throughout Cuba's cultural history – from the 1920s and 30s of *guajira-son*, to the re-remembered mapping of rural space (from within the city) of the Buena Vista Social Club phenomenon (discussed below) – demonstrates something of an ideological push-and-pull dialectic in the construction and *place* of Cuban identity. The mapping of an urban (predominantly Havana) space, as Thomas (2010) explores, provides a sense of cosmopolitanism, or personalisable identities, and the personification of places through individual memories and relationships with place. The mapping, or imagined mapping, of rural places provides something of an ideologically-rendered remembrance of a shared root, an unmistakably autochthonous identity coming from within, and *only* from within, the geographical confines of the island. Again this mapping of Cuban place serves to further propagate the potent image of Cuban identity as existing cultural isolation (after the 'transculturation' (Ortiz, 1947) process at its inception, and its African root) and unique innovation. The place of the rural, and rural places, become crucial in understanding perceptions and constructions of Cuban identity. Their place on the map of Cubanness, even if imagined from within the city, is of paramount importance. It speaks of a desire to

⁸⁰ The Sierra Maestra is a mountain range in the East of Cuba.

⁸¹ This rural image of the *guajiro* as archetype of Cuban is also used to connect a sense of Cuban identity historically. The immensely popular cartoon *Elpidio Valdés*, detailing the exploits of the eponymous *mambí* in the war against the Spanish, presents a continued image of Cuban identity as existing within this rural environment (one closely associated with nationalism, a mistrust (even ridicule) of more powerful foreign interest, and a love of Cuban culture.)

locate Cuba away from the (potentially) tourist-inflected or more ‘cosmopolitan’ centres, and towards the self-contained peripheries, and thus a desire for an (imagined) ‘indigenous’, and internally-constructed Cuban identity⁸².

A more recent revival of the remembered rurality of Cuban identity comes in a song that could perhaps stake a claim to rivalling ‘Guantanamera’ as the most globally famous image of Cuba, and perhaps best demonstrates the melding of rural and urban places in the space of Cuban identity: ‘*Chan Chan*’.

**De Alto Cedro, voy para Marcané,
llego a Cueto, voy para Mayarí**

From Alto Cedro, I go to Marcané,
I arrive in Cueto, then I go to Mayarí

The song’s lyrics serve to continue the wide gamut of musical texts in Cuba’s pantheon extolling specific places within the island as markers of a national identity. Cubanness is to be found in these rural sites. In this sense, the song is not so different from the scores that precede it: a homage to the birth sites of Cubanness.

And yet in the song’s turn-of-the-millennium renaissance, there seems to be something of a confusion between the city and the countryside locations. The song’s use in opening Wim Wenders’s documentary film ‘Buena Vista Social Club’ (1999) conjure up something of an exotic cartography for the listener – assuming, as do Hugh Barker and Yuval Taylor in ‘Faking it: The Quest for Authenticity in Popular Music’, that the listener is not Cuban, claiming that “most Cubans have never heard the recording” (2007:302). Four places pepper the yellow subtitles at the bottom of the screen. As the incantation of place is repeated, we as viewer/listener are given ‘clues’ as to their location of the places and their significance to the soundworld and identity unfolding before us through the images accompanying them, though they may not necessarily be factually accurate. The first repetition shows Compay Segundo and Eliades Ochoa – the former in a suave Panama hat, the latter in robust cowboy hat (symbolic trademarks both) – exchange a knowing smile on stage in a darkened theatre as the unseen audience cheer wildly.

⁸² It is perhaps interesting to note that with the resurgence of tourism in Cuba in the 90s (Gott, 2004 and Perez, 2006), and with the revival, in certain quarters, of this spectre of Cuban hedonism – rum, tobacco, dancing – as an advertisement of Cuban identity (as imposed form without), there seems to have been something of a parallel revival of this invocation of the ‘*guajiro*’, and associated authentic locations. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the Buena Vista Social Club song ‘*Chan Chan*’, whose chorus describes almost a road map of authentic, *guajiro* Cubanness; a series of small towns where the ‘true Cuba’ can still be found, in spite of the new influx of tourists. It is also perhaps ironic that this image of rural Cuban identity has become incorporated into the tourist perception of Cuba; and is as sought by this new ‘vintage’ of tourists.

As the famous four-chord pattern swirls around, the camera cuts from the live concert to a number of images of Havana in all its glorious, colourful degradation. An anachronistic grandiose car speeds through ocean spray on the *Malecón*, Ry Cooder and son Joachim are seen on a rickety motorbike and side car, searching for ‘something’ on avenues of dishevelled colonial pillars as old men riding bicycles pass by and old women hang washing out on balconies and gossip. Rusting Chevies and Buicks dodge the myriad potholes as Ry and Joichim maintain their colourful vigil along the streets. The accompanying lyrics speak of *Juanita* and the eponymous hero *Chan Chan* sitting on a beach engaging in light-hearted foreplay, and the narrator sitting quietly on an old tree trunk on some forgotten dusty road on his journey around a boundary line of authentic Cuba at once obscured from the listener, yet well known to the performer; almost magical places the listener will never know, and the singer knows only too well.

But these four repeated places – Alto Cedro, Marcané, Cueto, Mayarí – are not places in Havana, though the accompanying images would suggest that they are. In fact they are small villages in Holguín province in the east of Cuba. But the amalgamation of these two disparate places – the city and the countryside - is telling. As noted above, though the Buena Vista Social Club were determinedly looking ‘within’ Cuba (and back in time) for their reflection of Cuban cultural identity, the product itself was ‘aimed outward’, reflecting a sense of Cubanness for those outside. As Louis Perez notes, Cuban identity – perhaps even the places associated with ‘authentic Cubanness’ have often been defined from without:

Images [of cultural identity that] Cubans sought to negate were precisely the ones that succeeded in representing Cuba as a commodity [in the US]. The contest for control of representation and self-identity was rarely easy and almost never won... If the United States served as the place of personal fulfilment and professional accomplishment, it was necessary to conform to what popular tastes and market forces proclaimed ‘Cuban’ to be (Perez, 1999:215).

The identity imposed upon the island from without that Perez discusses here is one where music and dance played a significant role. However, their role was not necessarily aimed at defining and representing a social commentary upon contemporary Cuban identity, but rather to entertain, and thus second-guess the preconceived mores of a foreign market, whether within the U.S. itself, or as a backdrop to the increasingly important tourist trade. This was the Cuba imagined in this post-independence, pre-revolutionary period, and it was largely imagined by United States tourism. This perception of Cuban identity as urban, as hedonistic, and exotic, yet somehow quaint, approachable, and ‘rural’ was one that Kapcia

suggests began to permeate into Cuban self-definition, precisely because of the islands dependence upon the US:

During the six decades following political independence from Spain, Cuba imported not only investments, consumer commodities, food, technology, and business methods from the United States, but also much of its culture, including many of the ideas that Cuba held about itself. In Havana, at least, a Cuban identity and mode of life was filed away in the memories of a few Cuban anthropologists and historians (O'Conner, 1970:1, in Kapcia, 1982:68).

In the Buena Vista Social Club's rural road map – and in the documentary's rural-urban palimpsest – are held some of the complexities of place, and the collocation of music, place identity and authenticity. As Sheila Whiteley et al note:

Music, then, plays a significant part in the way that individuals author space, musical texts being creatively combined with local knowledges and sensibilities in ways that tell particular stories about the local... At the same time, however, it is important to note that such authoring of space produce not one, but a series of competing narratives (Whiteley, Bennett and Hawkins, 2004:3).

Here we see a competing narrative of the rural depiction and description of Cuban identity in music; at once a reference to the self-contained, autochthonous sites of Cuban creation, and yet those same sites of authenticity were often imagined and sung about from within the city, a space often of cosmopolitan influence and projecting an image of Cubanness 'outside' the island.

Singing the City: Urban Cuban Identity

The above does not suggest that references to rural locations made by urban musicians were exclusively tourist-inflected and somehow 'inauthentic' representations of Cuban (or individual) identity and that these locations were not conceived of, and constructed, as sites where authenticity could be found. Indeed, running parallel to the references to rural places throughout Cuban history have been copious examples of references to the city, not surprisingly mostly centred around Havana⁸³, as a site of authentic Cuban musical/identity construction. As Vincenzo Perna suggests, many of these songs to the city were presented in a similar manner to their rural counterparts, "ode[s] to places of conventional urban prettiness" (2005:172). These songs to the city may have geographically relocated the identity of Cuba from a rural to an urban setting, but perhaps left in place many of the ideological conceptions of what constituted a Cuban identity.

However, these depictions of the somehow nostalgic urban setting (still a telling feature of conceptions of Cuba) were radically redefined in the Special Period. Musicians in genres

⁸³ Though other notable examples might be '*rucu rucu a Santa Clara*' by Irakere, or the invocation of *Cienfuegos* as a key site in *Guaguanco*.

such as timba and hip hop took to redefining relationships to, and depictions of, the city. Geoff Baker writes of this reconstituted musical relationship with the city that:

Since the 1990s... the urban environment has been a key constitutive element in the development of [Cuban] hip hop, but also... this relationship has been dialogic and... rappers have participated in the social construction of late socialist Havana (Baker, 2006:219).

Baker's analysis continues to demonstrate the importance of place to conceptions and constructions of Cuban cultural identity, but the places sung (or rapped) about are different. Perna's analysis of the timba song "*Los Sitios Entero*" by NG la Banda similarly demonstrates the shift in focus from this rural-urban paradigm to a more determinedly urban placed identity. The song makes reference to, indeed situates itself within, the *barrio* of Los Sitios in Havana, and through its vivacity, determinedly 'local' language (musically and socially, as well as literally linguistically), it speaks of a recontextualised positioning of the place of Cubanness. Cuban identity is positioned away from the romantic rurality of the *guajiro*, away too from the romanticised imagery of the city, and towards another conception of an authentic place of Cubanness, an act which is as politically motivated as it is aesthetically motivated. Perna claims of the song that by "identifying Los Sitios with rumba, [song writer José Luís] Cortés celebrates as 'an authentic neighbourhood', home to the real *cubanía*, a black, working class area" (ibid.:174). The Cuban identity here is made distinctly urban but also, through its strong connection to rumba, it presents a Cubanness that is "a world of toughness, machismo, danger and crime populated by lower-class Blacks" (ibid.:176). As Perna points out, however, this description of the home of 'authentic Cubanness' should not be seen as "innocently 'mirroring a reality'" (ibid.), but as a deliberate strategy to present a marginalised Cuban voice, that of urban Black communities, facing a tacit prejudice from a supposedly 'colourless society' (Sujatha Fernandes, 2003), and stake for it some form of legitimacy within Cuban discourse.

A further example of the authentic urban place in contemporary Cuban music comes in Habana Abierta's⁸⁴ 1999 song '*Arrollando Bien*', written and sung by José Luís Medina. The song makes an overt reference to place and, in doing so, nail its colours as an authentic voice of contemporary Cubanness firmly to the mast. Alongside the mentioning of place – Guanabacoa, a *barrio* in Havana that is as "unmistakably black" to Cuban listeners as the

⁸⁴ 'Habana Abierta' are a collective of Cuban musicians living and working in Spain. Though the band themselves describe the music as '*rockason*' – a hybrid genre fusing rock with Cuba's most symbolically national genre son – in truth the album's musical influences are much more diverse. Shades of funk, rumba, conga, hip hop and jazz all find their way into the eclectic soundworld.

Los Sitios sung about by NG la Banda (Perna, 2005:172) with the added reputation as a hotbed for *Santería* – is a list of Cuban musicians *from* Guanabacoa whose place in the pantheon of Cuban greats is uncontested:

**Yo soy de Guanabacoa
To' el mundo lo sabe bien
De allí tambien era el Bola
El gran maestro Lecuona
Dona Rita Montaner
Yo no respeto a otra joya, Yo no respeto a otra joya
Yo sigo, yo sigo mi negra...**

I'm from Guanabacoa
Everyone knows that
Bola was also from there
And the great maestro Lecuona,
Lady Rita Montaner
You can't get any better than that
Here I go, *mi negra*

In both the naming of place and the listing of Cuban greats from that place, Habana Abierta are, as Perna suggests of NG la Banda, forging an authentic location where the 'real Cubanness' may be located. They are making, or at least helping to reinforce, Guanabacoa as an authentic place. The three greats mentioned are the flamboyant pre-Revolutionary piano player Bola de Nieve, composer and piano maestro Ernesto Lecuona and the multi-talented Rita Montaner; all from this same barrio, all assured of a place in Cuba's musical annals. Yet their strong alliance in these line to the specific location (rather than to Havana, or even to Cuba) is telling. For it creates an aura around the place mentioned that is familiar in many other discourses surrounding 'authentic places'. It suggests that somehow the *place itself* is partly responsible for imbuing these greats with their talents, and that the place itself hold within it a multitude of similar stars waiting to emerge.

In asserting the importance of Guanabacoa to these three stars, Habana Abierta create something of the same connection between 'hero' and place. Rita Montaner *becomes* Guanabacoa; becomes a representation of its people and evidence that it is a place where a definitive image of Cuban musical prowess can be unearthed simply by finding someone from that place; Guanabacoa is full, it would seem, of budding Rita Montaners. José Luís Medina's impassioned assertion that he too comes from this place further serves to accentuate the potency of this authentic place; contemporising it by showing that this new generation of Cuban music owes its existence to this authentic place.

As Perna saliently points out, the referencing of place in song is not as innocent as "mirroring a reality" (2005:176). Guanabacoa is not *a priori* an authentic place. By

referencing it in song – by deeming it important enough to sing about, and by implying its importance in forming these past greats, Habana Abierta are imbuing this place with its authenticity, whilst simultaneously describing the facets that constitute authenticity to them; that is success, musical prowess, an intimate knowledge of Havana, perhaps, it may even be said, an air of internationalism – Rita Montaner (the highest of the high) being celebrated and working in Cuba and the United States.

Having outlined the authenticity of this place, they then attach themselves to that authentic place. They are, as the whole world knows, from that place and thus, by definition, must share in that authenticity, there can be no doubt that the band themselves are an authentic voice of Cubanness because they come from an authentically Cuban place. In this short section of Cuban rap, a clear example of the mutual authentication suggested above can be seen: artist mentions and authenticates place, and by doing so envelops him/herself in that authenticity, which in turn provides more authenticity to the place mentioned.

Porno Para Ricardo's Havana: Authentic Places?

This process of locating one's identity within a place in order to legitimise that identity, and to garner some form of authenticity *to speak to contemporary Cuban identity* through reference to place is one that Porno Para Ricardo, in part, also engage in. The places the band reference as important to *their* Cuban identity differ markedly from both the rural and urban conceptions of Cubanness outlined above, revealing a desire to at least partially redraw (or draw over) the cultural map of Cuban identity as linked to places. As such, the Cubanness described and reflected by the band in drawing this 'alternative' map differs significantly. However, in at least a few examples, the process of collocating place and identity construction, and the notion of authenticity, is similar, and connects Porno Para Ricardo more closely to their Cuban progenitors than they may seem. Equally, the band attempt to connect themselves to these championed authentic places, similarly engaging in this mutual authentication process, where places are reinforced as important, and the band are linked to the importance of the place.

Yet in Porno Para Ricardo's places of redefined Cubanness, there is much less of the innate birthplace mythologisation. Their authentic sites are worked for, constructed and maintained, fought for (and lost), and always contested. 'Their places' do not exist as natural springs of Cubanness, but rather are made by the people who stake a claim to them as part of their individual and collective identities. Such a renegotiation of authentic places can be seen in their parodies of 'other' ostensibly authentic sites of 'alternative' Cuban

identity. Porno Para Ricardo seek to break the relationship between certain places connected to the *friki* movement and this paradigm of innate authenticity; severing the link between authenticity and place – or more specifically, with respect to the *friki* movement – that simply asserting a connection to a specific place does not in and of itself constitute an authentic identity. In short, place becomes important only as a platform from which to proactively assert one’s identity; a place to disseminate a message, rather than as a place one must go to in which to find that identity.

Reflections of ‘El Patio de María’

It is often difficult to extricate the geographical from the historical in these references to place. Often these ‘authentic’ places evoke a timeline of remembrances, perhaps even a site at which these remembrances can take place. In a sense, Porno Para Ricardo’s references to one particular site, the erstwhile alternative music venue ‘*El Patio de María*’, not only invoke (evoke) a spatial place, but also a temporal place. Though no litany of past greats are established in the band’s invocation of this place, the references to this defunct location distinctly locate a point on the map of a alternatively constructed Cuban identity; a place that was (and still is) of significance, and the persistent references to this particular place now gone, serve to establish a temporal and spatial authenticity mapped atop one another.

In the reference to place found in ‘*Te acuerdas de...*’⁸⁵, remembrance (and loss) are as important to the identity as the credentials in the construction of a Cuban rock identity:

**¿Te acuerdas del Coparum?
Era la playa de los frikis por entero...
¿Te acuerdas del Patio de María?
Pa’l rock el único singao lugar que había.**

Do you remember the ‘*Coparum*’
It was all the beach of the ‘*frikis*’...
Do you remember the Patio de María?
For rock, it was the only fucking place we had

These two places, locations which were important places in the nascent days of *friki* culture in Havana, are simultaneously authenticated and mourned; both culturally relevant and lost. The first, the *Coparum* beach in Havana, establishes some form of specific collectivity, one perhaps more selective than the broadly pan-generational construction seen in Chapter One, where more common (and less geographically placed) remembrances could be shared by a greater number of young Cubans. To remember the *Coparum*, one would have had to go there. And to go there, according to Porno Para Ricardo, one would have to have been

⁸⁵ See Chapter One.

a *friki*. The beach was claimed as ‘theirs’: it was ‘their place’. Not only was this beach claimed by the *frikis*, but it was integral to their cultural map, and as such, was integral in shaping the experience and shared cultural identity of the participants. Perhaps this remembered place is creating a subcultural unity, placing it in an authentic location, working along similar lines as the examples of authenticity mapping discussed above; creating a geographical (but simultaneously historical) map of identity, listing the places where it can be ‘found’, but also where it was ‘born’. These key sites act as markers in the identity construction. If one remembers going to *Coparum*, then one can claim a *friki* identity for oneself. However, they also become places where this identity exists, where identity can be ‘found’ and which establish an authenticity for identity by *placing* it geographically. It becomes authentic by having its innate connection to Cuba mapped out. Yet the beach is not spoken about as an on-going place of significance in this singular reference. It is lamented, referred to in the past tense. It is a cultural point erased, rubbed out and no longer the place where rock culture in Cuba can be found; its erstwhile immortality (it *was* the *friki*’s beach forever) long gone. The second place addressed is also gone physically, but its significance, it seems, lives on.

There is no ambiguity, no room for nostalgic remembrance of a thing left behind, in Gorki’s interrogative remembrance of ‘*El Patio de María*’. The remembrance of “the only fucking place we had” speaks of a violent removal of a place still relevant. As Laura García Freyre’s impassioned description of ‘*El Patio*’ attests, this venue became “one of the most emblematic [places] for Cuban rock” (2008a:556), and one of the cornerstones of the map of authenticity for *friki* culture:

From 1987 until 2003, [*el Patio de María*] was the preferred forum for rock concerts and a meeting place for young *frikis* as well as an alternative option to the state... where they could present live rock bands and also [pay] in local currency (ibid.).

The venue offered a location where bands such as Porno Para Ricardo could perform; a niche outside the hegemonic, and tightly controlled, agency structure, where adherence to the rules of the Revolution was at least a superficially necessary acquiescence. In this request to remember ‘*El Patio*’, again the band appear to be seeking to establish a significant temporal/spatial point on the map of subcultural collectivity and a reference point for locating this subcultural community *within* Havana. A shared place to remember, a place of remembrance, a location integral to the construction of this alternative Cuban identity, a point that shaped it through the gigs played and attended, through the myriad quotidian/profound interactions, through the fostering of a space of rebellion, of

individual and collective identity construction that was simultaneously new, yet rooted in Cuba.

Yet, as with the *Coparum* beach, it is a place remembered; a place no more. The venue was closed, under the auspices of a “*Plan Coraza*” (defence plan) against drug trafficking, in 2003, and was one constituent part of a significant ‘crack down’ on the burgeoning *friki* movement (García Freyre, 2008b). The plan formed part of the ‘Black Spring’ discussed in the introduction, a governmental initiative that saw numerous “dissidents” (including Gorki himself) incarcerated. In this light, the place is given an even greater significance; the reference more important. It becomes a spectre, but a potent reminder of the power and notoriety the subcultural *mêlée* of Cuban identities that congregated at ‘*El Patio*’ were garnering. ‘*El Patio*’ itself, though defunct as the band recorded this song, becomes a symbolic place where this identity was constructed, a place of communion, a niche, a last bastion, a home.

Importantly, this place was a niche carved out, a home built by the inhabitants. It is no wellspring of authenticity, and its demise – and precisely its *remembrance*, not its revival – speaks to the band’s attitude towards these so-called authentic places. It is this state of passing that sets Porno Para Ricardo’s ‘*Patio*’ apart from, for example, Habana Abierta’s ‘*Guanabacoa*’, or Buena Vista Social Club’s road map of Cuban villages. Those places are presented as existing in some imagined, semi-real, but still contemporary identity: Rita Montaner (or perhaps ‘the next’ Rita Montaner) may still be found in Habana Abierta’s referent, or one may still find the eponymous ‘Chan Chan’ sitting by the side of Compay Segundo’s road. But one will not find such an archetypal authentic *friki* – a claimed image of a new Cuban identity - still head-banging at Porno Para Ricardo’s ‘*El Patio de María*’. For Porno Para Ricardo’s references to ‘*El Patio*’ represents a ‘full stop’, a place that was once authentic but is now no more than a bitter memory. It is a place ripped from them, removed forcibly as a geographical location for their identity. It is a lament for the lost ability to assert ‘an Other’ Cuban identity in mainstream or overt ways within Cuba, made geographical by the reference to a ‘lost place’, but more importantly, it is a pragmatic reminder of the necessity to *construct* the authentic place; to maintain it, and to recognise its demise, to build the place where one may find an identity, to forcibly grasp the land upon which to build a foundation, and through which to assert a claim to the term ‘Cuban’. ‘*El Patio*’ was not an innately authentic place, it was made authentic by the actions that took place there. And chief among these actions, for the band, were their own performances.

In their own work, in their own references to place, Porno Para Ricardo position themselves as key players in the story of ‘*El Patio*’. The track ‘*María*’⁸⁶ is presented as being a live recording at the titular ‘*Patio*’. A sea of cheering greets the chugging guitar chord intro, Gorki’s voice slaps back with reverb, echoing around the clamouring audience as he sings of the very place he is performing. Whether this song was actually recorded live or not is unclear, and the importance of staging a live performance within the context of an album for Porno Para Ricardo (and their personal identity construction) will be discussed in greater depth in the following chapter. That the band used to perform at ‘*El Patio*’ – at a period when they *were* permitted to perform in Cuba – is certainly an integral part of their own identity. So in references to ‘*El Patio*’ as a location where the band would perform (a place that would permit them to perform), not only is the place afforded an authenticity as somewhere rock music, and more importantly rock music that was overtly critical of the government, was encouraged and fostered, the band write themselves into that authenticity feedback loop. They become authentic as having performed at the place, and thus the place becomes authentic for having allowed them to perform. Porno Para Ricardo are seeking to establish themselves as part of the ‘authentic place’ dialogue, very much in the same way as Habana Abierta evoke their place within *Guanabacoa*.

However, this is only part of the work that the referencing of ‘*El Patio*’ is doing in Porno Para Ricardo’s songs. If they are indeed attempting to establish their part in the history of an authentic place for *friki* culture, they are also keen to assert that these authentic places need to be constructed and maintained. As with the remembrance of *Coparum*, the site of established authentic identity is gone. It is spoken about in the past tense, to be remembered, not lived. Tellingly, these ‘authentic places’, such as they are, need to be exactly that; *places* in which ‘authenticity’ is proved, not a site where one can go to find, or achieve, authenticity. Part of the consternation that the band have with this same *friki* movement, discussed in greater detail in the following chapter, stems precisely from their tendency to establish the same style of mythological ‘birth place’ narratives surrounding locations as do other genres, and other definitions of Cuban identity. One such place that comes to stand both for the archetypal ‘*friki* place’, and the subject for much of Porno Para Ricardo’s parody, is *Parque G*.

‘*Vámonos Pa G*’: Reflections of ‘*Parque G*’

Porno Para Ricardo’s naming of place in song does much more than attempt to beatify place in the search for authentication of identity. They seem keen to present Cuban rock

⁸⁶ Track Six on ‘*Rock Para Las Masas...*’.

music as somewhat removed from this ‘birth place’ mythology so present in other genres of Cuban music, but more importantly, the band are keen to point to the disingenuousness of aligning oneself to a place that is heralded as always already authentic. In Porno Para Ricardo’s references to places particularly associated with *friki* culture, there is a criticism of a movement that contains members seeking a personal authentication – one associated with the *posture* of rebellion – without the necessity to maintain, construct and contest the importance of place, and thus actually rebel against governmental or cultural hegemonies that would deny the subcultures’ legitimacy as an alternative interpretation of Cuban identity.

These contestations with *friki* claims of authenticity surface most often in the band’s references to ‘Parque G’. The small park (really little more than a strip of concrete, grass, park benches and statues, between lanes of the sloping hill of *Avenida de los Presidentes*) serves as a site for young Cubans to congregate, bringing bottles of rum and acoustic guitars to an ever-evolving collection of people. The park has been claimed as a meeting place for many young Cubans, but it is most notably championed as the principal location – *the* authentic place – for *frikis*, a place where the *friki* movement can find expression and interact, a space in which they may formulate and claim a placed identity. As such it has become a place to see and to be seen, a site of pilgrimage, to an extent, that one must attend in order to assert a personal authenticity that can claim “I was there”, or a more continuous “I go there”. In a sense, the park plays much the same role as do many of the other invocations and celebrations of place as integral to a shared identity. It becomes a symbol for that identity, a place that must be claimed as part of the individual identity; a place that becomes part of the person.

Yet part of Porno Para Ricardo’s argument is that the process is not as reciprocal as perhaps their involvement with ‘El Patio’ as discussed above. Place becomes part of the person, but there is less of a proactive desire for the person to shape and maintain the place. For Porno Para Ricardo, *Parque G* represents something of an *inauthentic place* precisely because of the ease of access, and the ease with which people can stake a claim to ‘belong’ to the place, and thus ‘tap into’ its authenticity without ever having to actually demonstrate their fidelity to the *friki* movement, and without ever having to make a proactive attempt to imbue the place with any significant action that may lend credence to its claim of authenticity as a site of anti-hegemonic ‘resistance’ and as a place of alternative Cuban identity construction.

As will be discussed in the following chapter, this concern of the desire for authenticity without the necessary battle – the ‘pose’ of the rebellious rocker without the ‘substance’ - is one part of Porno Para Ricardo’s complex interactions with the broader subcultural scene. In establishing a geographical place as the epicentre of a subculture’s authenticity, the process of actively (and aggressively) constructing identity, and the necessity to actively maintain and contribute to its definition is almost bypassed. One may ‘become a *friki*’ just by going to the place. The place becomes a symbol, paying homage to it becomes a fashion, engagement with the place becomes superficial. ‘*Parque G*’, for Porno Para Ricardo, becomes a mythical place, a place of fantasy, of appropriated symbols, of mimicry.

This fantasy is demonstrated in the way the park is portrayed by Porno Para Ricardo. Most often, it appears to be a semi-real theatre stage for some of the band’s more outlandish skits and characters. It is the stomping ground of the self-consciously cool *friki* persona in ‘*Black Metal*’ (discussed in greater depth in the following chapter), the place where he feels the ‘badness’ (authenticity) of his fantastical *friki* identity is asserted, without the need to actually demonstrate it. In ‘*Black Metal*’, this *friki* need only inform the listener that he is walking through ‘*Parque G*’, and the message is clear.

In another surreally staged scenario – this time a between-song skit entitled ‘*Gran Massacre en G*’⁸⁷ (‘Huge Massacre at G’) – the park becomes the scene of an Americanised, filmic re-enactment of police harassment against the *frikis*. A concerned news reporter (played by Gorki) informs us of a pitch battle between these two supposed arch-enemies, relays the heroic stand of the *frikis* as a hyper-real, cacophonic soundworld of helicopters blades, machine gun fire, police sirens and torrential rain provides the backdrop to the plaintive, pitch-altered words of a *friki* being interviewed (played by Ciro). The message of this hyperbolic, parodic, re-enactment of interactions between police and *frikis* is clear. It is as though the sensationalised, embellished retelling of the story of a skirmish given by the *friki* protagonist in ‘*Black Metal*’ to his friends later has been made a reality. The overblown distorted vision of his own notoriety and potency, an overestimation of the dangerousness police ascribe to him and his movement are played out in front of the faux-television cameras. It is clear that Porno Para Ricardo are addressing the hypocrisy they see in the actions of some *frikis* (particularly musicians) who continue to operate within the music industry run by the state, yet who claim to act as dissidents against it, or who claim to be treated as such. For Porno Para Ricardo, police harassment - indeed something of an ideological pitched battle – is a continual reality, and I think it is against this real experience

⁸⁷ Track 19 on ‘*Soy Porno, Soy Popular*’.

of repression and subjugation that Porno Para Ricardo are parodying the claims of the *frikis* residing in *G*⁸⁸.

There is also something to be said for the sonic language which is used in the re-telling of this story. The machine guns, the helicopters; these are not the sounds of Havana, but those of an U.S. action film. This sonic dislocation is significant in further emphasising the musical dislocation (again discussed in greater depth in the following chapter) the band see between many *frikis* aesthetic choices and their ability to speak to a contemporary Cuban reality. Particularly the adulation of American musical and cultural forms, without any recourse to remould and redefine these symbols to define a sense of Cubanness, becomes wholly inappropriate for the telling of a Cuban narrative. So as with this histrionic representation of an everyday Cuban reality, the result cannot help but sound false.

Following this hyperbolic skit, the band make their most direct reference to the *placed* identity of the park. In '*Vámonos pa G*' ('Let's Go to G'), the band further question the authenticity of this place. In a trademark sneer which contains within it a hint of resignation – sadness even? – Gorki expounds the reasons for flocking to this Mecca of authentic subcultural identity:

**Porque ya nos quitaron to' el espacio
porque no existimos pal' poder
porque somos héroes del fracaso
porque no hay futuro porque no hay porque**

**vámonos pa' G que no hay nada que hacer
vámonos pa' G que no hay nada que hacer⁸⁹**

because they have removed all our space
because we don't exist for the power
because we are heroes of the failure
because there's no future, because there is no 'because'

let's go to G, because there's nothing to do
let's go to G, because there's nothing to do

The complaint at the removal of space in the opening line speaks to the 'true authenticity' of places such as '*El Patio de María*', a place where a sense of defiance and countercultural music was truly located. But it also presents the park as something of an ersatz replacement, not capable of replicating the authenticity work that could be done at '*El*

⁸⁸ This is not to suggest that police harassment of other *frikis* has not, and does not still, take place, or that the park itself is a safe haven. Rather the claim here is of overstated claims of dissidence on the part of certain *frikis* who would, when faced with actual repressive power, tend to back down. This argument, as made by the band, is addressed in greater detail in the following chapter.

⁸⁹ See appendix for full lyrics.

Patio'. This erstwhile music venue, for Porno Para Ricardo, was a place in which the *sentiment* of rock could be found, rather than just its extraneous cultural trappings; it was a place to perform, rather than to be seen. It was, as noted above, a place constructed. A dichotomy is established between the authentic '*Patio*' and the inauthentic park, and between '*El Patio*' as an active space, and '*G*' as a passive place. For the band, the process of being made 'not to exist' is the very hallmark of an authentic rock voice within Cuba. In a society that demands compliance, to be censored demonstrates a noticeable anti-hegemonic stance – a *noticed* stance, considered potent enough to censor. It is this censorship which gives '*El Patio*' its authenticity, and it is what gives the band theirs:

A band that confronts what is officially established – an artist that confronts this is erased from the list and put on a black list, which means he doesn't exist. (Gorki, 2010)

In '*Vámonos pa G*', the park becomes the place to go *after* authenticity has been established, a place for beleaguered and censored social critics to prove their existence after having it removed from them. The very mundanity – the very urban centrality – makes visible their stand. Simply going to the park is not enough; one must resent going to the park, one must know that it is a symbol of the inability to go anywhere else, to go anywhere meaningful. Gigs cannot be played in the park, communication to a live audience is not possible. These things have been denied to Porno Para Ricardo. That is the sign of their authenticity as social critics and significant musical voices. The park becomes the symbol of that repression. It is a non-space, in a sense. Because there is "nothing to do", one must go there. Part of the criticism of *friki* culture that Porno Para Ricardo level is that they would consider hanging out at the park sufficient in their stance against political, cultural and social repression, that no successful endeavour to re-establish a radical site where an alternative Cubanness can be *expressed* (and not passively 'found') has taken place. It is a critique alluded to in the band's song castigating the anathematic 'Rock Movement' in the song "*la Agencia del Rock*"⁹⁰. In the midst of a list of all the things this collusive 'movement' have, provided by the state, Gorki asserts they continue "*sin el Patio de María*" ('without *el Patio de María*'), the implication being that attempts to construct a place of meaningful opposition is excised from this rock movement; that they are content with the posture of being alternative, without the action.

Unlike the selectivity of *Coparum* beach, or the proactiveness of '*El Patio*', Porno Para Ricardo's representations of '*Parque G*' portray it as a remainder, somewhere to go when there is nothing else to do. A place to be seen, perhaps, but not heard. As Laura García

⁹⁰ Track two on '*El Disco Rojo Deteñido*'. This track is discussed in the following chapter.

Freyre notes, in recent years the park has become appropriated as not a symbol of reluctance, but as a fashionable place in itself:

Park G... has been, in the last ten years or so, a meeting place at weekends for hundreds of young people who spend the night drinking and, occasionally, playing guitar and singing. As a public space, G was first conquered by the *frikis*, but now, as a reflection of the very few options available to young people for fun, it has been taken over by young people regardless of their musical identity (2008a:555).

Here presented is the same discourse of going to the park simply because there is nothing else to do. But it is a passive sort of nothingness, one that is tacitly accepted, not rallied against, or made indicative of a society that dismisses legitimate complaints. Boredom has long been a staple motif in punk music, having nothing to do a common complaint. However, Porno Para Ricardo present ‘G’ as a place where this nothingness is allowed, is made part of the identity, rather than something to be rallied against. The park becomes a symbol in and of itself; a place to be seen, divorced from “musical identity”.

For Porno Para Ricardo, the authentic place of Cubanness – a placed identity – exists. The cultural map of ‘their’ Cubanness and their identity is placed atop (or alongside) a reworked geographical map of significant places. But it is an identity denied. In its denial, the Cuban identity Porno Para Ricardo offer is revealed precisely because it is forced not to exist. The power of the authentic places they claim comes not from their innate authenticity, from the voices that are somehow ‘born’ from within them, but from their potential to *disseminate* the voices that people bring to them. For the band, there is no authentic site where one may go to find a Cuban identity, fully formed, but one may go to certain places (such as ‘*El Patio*’) to hear a Cuban identity voiced. Places must be fought for, carved out and reclaimed. They are made by the people who use them to present an identity. Place, in Porno Para Ricardo’s identity, is a way of grounding them within the nation; to assert their legitimacy in claiming a (type of) Cubanness for themselves as a constituent part of their identity. But places are used as platforms from which to disseminate that identity. They are thus authentic only to the extent to which they can afford such communication. It is a subtle change from the rural road map of the Buena Vista, or the extolled pantheon of Habana Abierta. ‘*El Patio*’, for Porno Para Ricardo, shares many of the same traits, yet it is not the place itself, but the people who have utilised it, that imbues place with its authentic status. The band’s representation and criticism of other ostensibly authentic places such as ‘*Parque G*’ attest to their opinion that relationship with a place is not enough; that going to the park is not an act of resistance, not a marker of authenticity. Authentic places are made such by what they give to their users; a platform to voice their own identity, a place where collective identities

can be negotiated, constructed, discussed and critiqued, but not where identity, fully formed, can be found.

Chapter Three: Subcultures and Institutions

“y así ser el más friki de todos los frikis”

* * *

Gorki and I are standing on an island in the middle of the Vltava River. The sun is shining golden on a floating plinth in the middle of the river. On the plinth is an old Soviet tank painted bright pink with a large middle finger sprouting from its roof. A group of tourists on pedalos clamber onto the tank's floating island and begin taking pictures. We turn our attention back to the stage, bathed in a warm afternoon sunshine, on which Gorki will be appearing in less than an hour.

Suddenly Gorki appears to stiffen, and keeps glancing surreptitiously over his shoulder. Over the next ten minutes or so, he tries to shake off this visible disturbance, yet seems incapable of resisting the compulsion to keep glancing behind him. Eventually, clearly agitated, Gorki suggests to our small group that we look at another part of the island on which the festival is taking place.

Standing on the other side of the narrow island, Gorki makes apparent the subject of his agitation. “See that man over there” he points through the flowing crowd and dappled foliage at an innocuous, though admittedly uncomfortable-looking, middle-aged man who was standing stock still near where we had been. I hadn't noticed him. There was nothing to notice. He was balding, with wisps of blonde-grey hair around his temples. He wore an uncomfortably tight denim jacket and jeans. “I think he might be a chivatón; a spy. He fits the type”. Gorki more than anyone would ‘know the type’.

The three of us try to reassure Gorki “why would they send someone all the way here?” “Look, he's talking to that woman” “he's wearing one of the official passes”. But Gorki – either made paranoid by nerves about the impending gig, or well-versed in the duplicitous and extensive lengths the Cuban government will go to – has an answer for every reassurance. “They often bring their wives”, “anyone could have got one of those passes”, “he just looks like the type”.

On stage, bravado – fuelled by adrenaline – has kicked in, and Gorki is his defiant, outspoken self. “Hands up if you're Cuban” he shouts to the audience. He doesn't wait for the translator this time because he's only speaking to a fraction of the audience who understands. “Nobody understands? Come on, put your hands up if you're Cuban” a few shouts of ‘aquí’ ring out weakly from the crowd. “A few then” smiles Gorki, ready for the punch line. “So keep your hand up if you're a chivatón, because I think there are a few chivatónes Cubanas here today”. He looks around half smiling, half menacing. “aquí, aquí” he mocks in high-pitch squeal.

Introduction: An Archipelagic Network of Subcultures?

The musical and cultural landscape of Cuba at the tail end of the Special Period was shaped by a growing interest in, and increased access to, a raft of interconnected popular music genres from the U.S. (and, to a lesser extent, other Anglophone countries). Although these routes of musical dissemination have been a persistent (and resistant) feature of the cultural landscape within Cuba since the Revolution (Mandulay López, 1997, Astley, forthcoming), their covert nature had often led to a “fragmentary, intermittent, and highly decontextualised” picture of foreign musics for their Cuban audiences (Pacini Hernandez and Garofalo, 1999:19).

Yet in the turn-of-the-millennium Havana in which Porno Para Ricardo were formed, some significant advances, technological as well as social, had been made, further increasing and melding the shards of foreign music managed to permeate the ideological barrier (maintained by both sides) engulfing Cuba, into a more holistic comprehension of ‘foreign’ musical genres and styles. The result was a burgeoning music scene (or perhaps a network of interconnected subcultures) defined under the broad rubric *‘frike’*; a musical movement that was cognisant of cultural trends abroad, but also of its own place within that cultural flow and perception of Cuba and its musical heritage within global narratives.

Certainly there can be no doubt that rock music has claimed a significant, if tentative, foothold within this newly mediated conception of Cuban culture (Astley, forthcoming). As Pacini Hernandez and Garofalo attest, although the presence of rock music has long been a visitor to the island, albeit at times surreptitious, denied, rallied against and at least officially prohibited, now “there are dozens, if not hundreds, of rock groups in Cuba, playing every imaginable sub-genre of rock, from grunge to death metal, to punk, each with a devoted fanbase” (2004:65). Spanning a wide gamut of rock music genres, these potentially aesthetically disparate subcultural groups could potentially represent something of a post-millennial expression of Antoni Kapcia’s assertion that through the Special Period, “Cuban culture [became] *‘un archipiélago’* of individualism” (2005:191). Though this diverse realm of musics may be connected by the term *‘frike’*, perhaps even build upon a common foundation of Cuba’s social, political and cultural landscape, each genre – each band, even – represents a distinct and bespoke island of individual identity construction. Perhaps this diverse base of rock-inflected musics offers several definitions of the term ‘Cuban rock music’. This broad spectrum of rock has been incorporated into a Cuban context, and has been put to work defining, and further augmenting, the space of Cuban identity. But that they are individually constructed identities reflecting the identities of the individuals making

and listening to these rock subgenres is crucial to understanding their popularity. So the hundreds of rock groups Cuba now boasts could be seen as something of an archipelagic chain of individually-defined Cubanenesses, all adhering to specific and interlinked cultural mores.

However, despite the unequivocal existence of such a wide gamut of rock bands of all hues, Porno Para Ricardo appear still to stand alone, severed from this archipelagic chain. Geoffrey Baker goes as far as to suggest that the band “are not part of any scene, since they have not been able to perform live for years, and, as Gorki himself says⁹¹, they receive little support from other artists; as an anarchic punk group, their relationship with the heavy-metal-dominated rock scene... has often been conflictive” (2011:30). Porno Para Ricardo’s position as a *bête noire* of the regime (an attitude that is more than reciprocal) is to be expected. However, their apparent distancing from this broader conglomeration of *frikis* is perhaps more surprising, particularly for a band so maligned by the system. Often, in their critical, disparaging lyrics it seems as though Porno Para Ricardo are as keen to remove themselves from these alternative musical subcultures within Havana as they are to remove themselves from state infrastructure.

Part of the band’s consternation seems to orient around critiques of a subculture (or subcultures) that appears too timorous to incorporate so assertive a voice as Porno Para Ricardo’s. The band seem to frequently parody, mock and castigate Cuba’s ‘rock scene’ for their compliance with stage infrastructure, and their apparent compromise to work “within the Revolution” as a way to ensure that their ability to perform both within and outside Cuba is not hampered. In short, there seems, in Porno Para Ricardo’s eyes, to be a disconnect between style and substance – between words (and even words are scarcely overtly defiant) and actions, as Gorki’s claim in the documentary *Cuba Rebelión* attests:

All the other [rock] bands say to me “it’s so great what you’re doing, it’s fantastic”, but no one invites our band to come and play. No one. (Gorki, in *Cuba Rebelión*, 2009)

This charge that the rock movement pays lip-service appreciation of his band, yet lacks the proactive support in the form of invitations to perform live, provides a damning indictment of the subculture, and reveals something of a mutual holding apart. Despite the dubious prestige of being labelled the “most censored band”, an epithet given to them (presented as a compliment⁹²) by Frank, rapper in the rap-rock band ‘QVA Libre’ (ibid.), or

⁹¹ Baker is referring particularly to Gorki’s quotes in ‘Cuba Rebelión’ (2009) quoted immediately below.

⁹² It is worth pointing out here some of the critiques of the documentary ‘Cuba Rebelión’ which Geoffrey Baker makes (2011), many of which I entirely agree with. The documentary’s positioning of Porno Para Ricardo as the admired outlaws of Cuba’s underground misrepresents their place and importance within

perhaps *because of* this isolating epithet, the band find few voices as bold as their own with which to connect. Though they may share many aesthetic influences with other contemporary Cuban rock musicians, and though they may share some of the political bent of this conglomerated, broadly left-wing, anti-hegemonic opposition to the binarisms of Revolutionary/*Gusano*, in many senses the band appear to be an island alone; severed from this archipelagic chain of commonality. For Porno Para Ricardo, there is “no such thing as a Cuban rock scene”⁹³.

“No Such Thing as a Cuban Rock Scene”: Authenticity and Mimicry

Porno Para Ricardo’s dual antagonisms with both the government and the more acquiescent elements of alternative subcultures would tend to reinforce something of an idealised binary of rock versus the state, a polemic which, as Baker writes, serves to gloss over some of the complex nuances of working ‘within’, but not necessarily ‘in agreement with’, the Revolution; a way of being that is common to many aspects of the Cuban everyday. Baker’s salient study of Cuba’s ‘underground’ musics (particularly hip hop) concludes that such binarisms, and perceived political affiliations, are problematic at best:

Underground musicians do not just resist or capitulate [to membership within state organisations]; they engage dynamically with the state, continually testing the limits. The reality is not one of simple domination and resistance but more of a game in which the participants are always pushing for more territory yet wary of total victory. State cultural officials are aware that heavy-handedness may be counterproductive... whilst artists who gain too many concessions from the state may lose their oppositional cachet (2011:12).

This playful pushing of the boundaries plays a different light on the concept of having to work within the Revolution from that discussed by both Perna (2006) and Moses (2000) below. It shows a system, like countless others in Cuba, where a game must be played in order to make one’s goals viable. It is not a game that is always so playful, it must be noted, and it is a game that many Cubans (Porno Para Ricardo included) can end up losing, often with long-standing and irrevocable consequences. But that it is played by many rock musicians does not necessarily preclude them from pushing the boundaries of both state control and the sound of legitimate Cuban musical identity. And yet Porno Para Ricardo, with their critiques of *friki* culture, seem to be suggesting that it does. Rock and the state, it seems, should not play together in this very Cuban game of pushing back boundaries.

Cuban alternative music, as alluded to in the introduction. Further, the blanket and binarising concept of Anti-Revolution ‘alternative’ musicians versus the repressive and censoring n state given in the documentary, as Baker points out in detail, glosses over many nuances of this complex system.

⁹³ This claim was made by Gorki in an unrecorded preliminary interview I conducted in May 2010. The claim was elaborated upon in the recorded interview cited throughout this work as ‘Gorki, 2010’.

To fully understand Porno Para Ricardo's frustration and confrontation with the conglomeration of *friki* subcultures, it is necessary to consider exactly where their consternations lie. The band's criticism seems to gravitate around two perceived points. Firstly, the continued operation within, and overreliance on, the state-run music 'industry'⁹⁴. Porno Para Ricardo would appear to find an incompatibility between rock music and governmental institution. Such arguments surrounding 'the mainstream' and 'selling out', of operating 'within the system', and the contradiction that such actions have to the authenticity of a musician, are well rehearsed arguments, existing as part of punk discourses (and not only there) in many different places and epochs. However, in the specific case of contemporary Cuba, spaces for political opposition are severely restricted within the island. The state effectively operates an overbearing hegemony over 'official' musical and cultural production, and, because of the prohibitively expensive price of CDs (Foehr, 2001:26) for most Cubans, the 'music industry' is engaged predominantly in promoting a face of Cuban musicality principally aimed at the foreign and tourist markets. In this cultural climate, the hypocrisies of making 'alternative' music from within the system (literally from 'within the Revolution'), for Porno Para Ricardo – a band vehemently excommunicated from this system – is an anathema. Perhaps this critique is particularly aimed at band's (as discussed below) who espouse an aesthetic of rebellion, and yet are subsume those symbols of defiance – symbols that were previously vigorously censored within Cuba – into the state system. Or perhaps, again, the band are demonstrating a frustration at the perceived hypocrisy of a government who can, as an exasperated Gorki recounts in 'Cuba Rebelión', at one moment forbid the owning of Beatles records, and at another, celebrate John Lennon's career by building a statue in a central-Havana park (non-coincidentally at a site of clashes between long-haired rockers and the police in the late-1960s and 70s). Bands who inculcate these supposed symbols of rebellion against 'the regime' *into* the regime are seen, by Porno Para Ricardo, as exacerbating the problem of state control, whilst diminishing the potency of the music they espouse.

Secondly, and connected to this first point, is the again well-versed authenticity argument of the aping of style and the cooption of cultural symbols without the necessary remodelling to fit, to describe, and to make sense of, the new cultural environment in which they are being utilised. As John Shepherd notes, music "does not 'carry' its meaning and 'give it' to participants and listeners. Affect and meaning have to be created anew in the specific social and historical circumstances of music's creation and use" (1993:138), and

⁹⁴ Because of its state-run infrastructure, the word 'industry' is perhaps problematic when describing the mechanisms for musical production which exist within Cuba.

at least part of Porno Para Ricardo's consternation with the Cuban *friki* movement is that the *style* of confrontational and oppositional music is being adopted, but without the reinvented *substance* that would make it truly applicable to, and representational of, contemporary Cuban identity⁹⁵. In short, the criticism is levelled that the overreliance on foreign styles problematises the existence of a national identity to the subsequent rock music made in Cuba. Gorki's description of certain rock musicians offering "no communication" (Gorki, 2010), or of fellow musicians choosing not to invite Porno Para Ricardo to perform with them, for fear of governmental recrimination, are telling supplements to his bold assertion that there is no such thing as a Cuban rock scene. The polemical statement may have more to do with the ability of the genre (as it exists in Cuba) to speak *to* a contemporary Cuban identity, rather than its presence upon the island at all. In short, for Porno Para Ricardo, there may be rock music in Cuba, but it is not *Cuban* rock.

Held within these two symbiotic critiques of the *friki* subcultural conglomeration – that they are both too reliant on the state, and too reliant on foreign musics imported and left unmediated – is the multifaceted problem of authenticity. Porno Para Ricardo's music, their socio-political message and their cultural bricolage are all tools, as this thesis attempts to show, through which they can construct and disseminate a group identity. But they are also tools for illuminating some facet of a more broadly defined *Cuban* identity. Which cultural symbols need to be reanalysed, recontextualised, augmented and, perhaps, discarded, in the band's view, all point to their personal description and construction of an 'authentic' Cuban identity.

Authenticity is a deeply problematic term in any field, but when the term is used as something of a bridge between musical practise and identity construction, it is even more fraught with uncertainty and intangibility. Precisely what has been claimed as 'authentically Cuban' in musical terms, and what precisely Porno Para Ricardo are suggesting *should be* considered as authentically Cuban seems always to be lurking just over the horizon; never stated outright, yet never quite absent. The claim of Cubannes that forms so integral a part of the band's work, constantly returning (or never leaving) and in constant need of address, is of paramount importance in understanding the band's identity, and the social commentary they advance. In attempting to better define (or further problematise) the term authenticity and its uses in popular music, Richard Elliott notes one important distinction between two different approaches to 'being authentic', suggesting that

⁹⁵ This critique the band make of *friki* culture is expanded upon in the following chapter.

“authenticity can be further problematized by considering whether one is speaking of being true to a template or to an original version” (Elliott, 2010:202). It is a dichotomy that Deena Weinstein similarly addresses:

The modern romantic notion of authenticity – creating out of one’s own resources – became dominant over the idea that authenticity constituted a relationship, through creative repetition, to an authentic source (1998:142).

This duality of authenticities is played out in two archetypes in a number of popular music settings. On the one hand, there is the “romantic notion” of the creative artist being true to his or her own creative talents, having a ‘vision’ and of maintaining a fidelity to completing that vision irrespective of exterior forces. On the other hand, there is the student of a tradition, someone who gains an understanding of the authentic hallmarks of a style, who ‘lives’ that music and is seen as both a champion and custodian of some innately authentic tradition. Of course, as Elliott notes, these two positions are the extreme ends of a spectrum, and the real-world authenticity work of popular musicians allows for a negotiation between these two positions. So to map them directly on to the two dominant and contrasting positions one may find in post-Special Period Cuban music – the *friki* and the traditional musician – is to oversimplify both. As Weinstein notes, “rock proclaims... the new beginning, the absolute origin. But like all cultural forms, it is intertextual, always already immersed in a past” (1998:137), thus the authenticity of being true to oneself is always intermeshed with the authenticity of being true to a generic template. Certainly for Porno Para Ricardo, the authenticity of a certain punk template is of importance in constructing their individualised aesthetic. Their knowledge of the history of the genre, its progenitors and its aesthetical and political modes and symbols are interwoven throughout the band’s work. But what appears crucial to the band’s music is the somewhat romantic notion of self-directed creation. As Gorki’s description of his creative process alludes to, the writing of a song seems to be a process fraught with uncertainty, and yet somehow ‘natural’:

I don’t know anything about music. I do it by creative instinct. I feel the need for constantly creating something. It makes me feel passionate. And it gives sense to my life... My musical creation is a little bit chaotic, because I don’t have a method. If you see the way I write a song, on little bits of paper here and there. I suffer during the creative process, since there are so many roads to get to a song, I don’t know which one to pick... Many of the songs I have written, I have done so whilst riding my bike. When I pedal down the street, I’m always on my bike, I don’t like to take the bus. So riffs come to my mind [sings a riff] sometimes it gives me an idea for a theme, an idea for a song, so I start thinking about it and develop it and when I get home, I rush to my guitar to write it down – that’s how I do it... I studied very little. Just very basic things that I learned on the electric guitar. I don’t think I’m the only one, there are many people who write songs in that manner,

mostly in rock and roll since it's a popular type of music, many people have empirical knowledge. They didn't study it (Gorki, 2010).

Here, a process of creative struggle, instinctive and empirical, is endured by the composer. The result is the unmediated message, the words of the author, untainted. The process of writing the song becomes about preserving that message, delivering it to the audience in as overt and uncompromised a manner as possible. One need only revisit Gorki's maxim of lyrical clarity and directness here to reinforce the point (Placák, 2006, Maza, 2010). This style of musical creation is ascribed by Gorki to the world of rock music; a world divorced from study, from templates and knowledge, of standards and chord structures. It is empirically *felt* by the author, and its success is judged on the ability to represent the author's inner feelings. Perhaps part of the contestation the band feel towards the *friki* movement is their lack of empiricism.

As both Antoni Kapcia (2005) and Vincenzo Perna (2006) separately point out, the proclivity for music within Cuba stems at least partially from the very high level of formal musical education, in specialist music schools, available⁹⁶ (indeed necessary) for the pursuit of a career in music. Kapcia notes that "musicians were expected to have graduated from the ISA or other specialist schools" and that this has led to the creation of a "generation aware of traditional music" (Kapcia, 2005:198). Perna adds that this professional capacity can also be found within popular music, suggesting of timba that "its fusion has been brought about by musicians with first-class conservatoire training" (2005:3). Though this technical proficiency and conservatoire training may, as Perna further notes, set timba apart from many other popular styles, within Cuba's other popular genres, including its many diverse forms of rock music, it is not quite so unusual.

Yet to Porno Para Ricardo, and their professed model of personal expression – their 'true to self' mentality – perhaps this conservatoire training (which, it should be pointed out, is by no means shared by all rock musicians, nor is it a prerequisite of all Cuban musicians, irrespective of genre) breeds a certain form of conservatism; an overreliance on style; an overfamiliarity with the 'template', at the expense of the expression of the 'true' self. The band are adamantly self-taught, have received little or no musical training, and embrace an amateur aesthetic throughout their recordings. Similarly, there is very little outside interference in the production of the CDs; the band record and produce all their material from their home studio. This points to an aesthetic that champions the 'true to self' mode

⁹⁶ Obviously these schools, and their tuition, are not available to all Cuban students. But there does seem to be both a higher level of prestige, and an earlier professional requirement to study a specifically music-orientated curriculum at specialist schools for many of Cuba's potential musicians, even those hoping for a career in popular music.

of authenticity, seeing institutions (as discussed below) as innately inauthentic in their desire to mediate, control and manage the message being sent from musician to audience.

Outside the Revolution... and Outside Subculture

A running theme mentioned and analysed in many of the other specific chapters herein is Porno Para Ricardo's consternation with the insidiousness of a 'rock agency', a union intimately linked to the upper echelons of revolutionary power that effectively controls musical production, acting as a gatekeeper over the legitimate (and legal) use of the term 'musician' (García Freyre, 2008a). Aside from the paradox inherent (in Porno Para Ricardo's eyes) in the allegiance between the state and an ostensibly anti-hegemonic, countercultural musical form, and the further proof of the state's unwillingness (and inability) to foster truly free speech without political censorship, the band display a deeply disparaging distrust for those musicians who inculcate themselves so readily 'within the Revolution', yet who still maintain some claim to authenticity as rock musicians. The debate, the lament, that appears so vociferously, and so often, throughout the band's oeuvre, is as much one of authenticity – the authenticity of the countercultural, the authenticity of the marginalised, the authenticity of the voice that will say whatever it wants to say, whatever 'needs' saying, that will "say what others daren't" – as it is specifically 'Anti-Castro', anti-Revolution, or anti-governmental. In his strongly worded attack on the 'Rock Agency', Gorki's consternation is as much with the acquiescence of rock musicians, as it is the domineering state:

The only thing we have in Cuba is a wrongly named "rock movement" which is even directed by a governmental agency called the "Rock Agency" that answers to the government. It is a total aberration of what rock is, when did rock ever have to be institutionalised? The saddest thing is that some people believe that they need the state to support their creativity and are not conscious of the "do it yourself" spirit that has always been the standard for rock and roll (MLC, 2008).

In this double castigation, Porno Para Ricardo stand apparently alone, between (or outside) both the revolutionary hegemony, and outside the subcultural movements that appear to exist at least in tacit acceptance of this antithetical power structure, whilst simultaneously claiming to oppose it. Here, the band's oft-cited assertion that part of their manifesto is 'to say what others daren't' is given a particularly barbed pertinence; to say what others daren't, even though they claim to. To say what others *should* say.

‘Comunista Chivatón’ – ‘Communist Snitch’

The song *‘Comunista Chivatón’* (‘Communist Snitch’⁹⁷) sets out one of the band’s most pointed criticisms of the *Asociación Hermanos Saiz* (AHS) and associated Rock Agency. In bitter, biting, personal words, Ciro addressed his target, demonstrating the literal nature of Gorki’s desire to give “name and surname” to the band’s antagonists (cf. Cuba Rebelión, 2009, Placák, 2006), to address their concerns overtly and directly, and not to “hide behind metaphor and poetic language” (Placák, 2006). The lyrics are brash, vulgar and open with the very name of the former head of the AHS, Alpidio Alonso. Throughout he is made the butt of jokes (his skills as a poet are called into question), has allegations levelled (the source of the funds acquired to renovate his house is mooted) and copious insults hurled at him (*‘singao comunista chivatón’* being among the most shockingly assertive). But his greatest ‘crime’ appears to be his reluctance to let Porno Para Ricardo play their music:

*El singao chivatón Alpidio Alonso
no quiere que los Porno toquen más
Alpidio Alonso dice que no que no
que el no está en na´
y cuando le dicen
que quieren invitarnos a tocar
Alpidio Alonso
no deja que vallamos a quemar⁹⁸*

The fucking snitch Alpidio Alonso
doesn’t want Porno to play any more
Alpidio Alonso says no, no
that he’s not into anything
but when someone
wants to invite us to play
Alpidio Alonso
doesn’t want us to go and burn

In Porno Para Ricardo’s eyes, they are prohibited to perform by a single (named) antagonist, and thus are denied a space within what may constitute ‘officially sanctioned’ Cuban music. Perhaps this denial is musical; the band’s brash sound is perhaps too ‘un-Cuban’? Ciro’s lyrics suggest otherwise. In this verse, we hear that Porno Para Ricardo receive invitations to perform live, only to be thwarted by an institution unwilling to allow them to voice their criticisms. The prohibition, then, on performing live within Cuba is not due to Porno Para Ricardo being un-Cuban – an uneasy fit within an association

⁹⁷ The word *‘chivatón’* is a particularly Cuban word loaded with pejorative connotations. It is used to refer to those people who inform upon neighbours etc to the CDR; a mixture of neighbourhood gossip, and duplicitous spy.

⁹⁸ See appendix for full lyrics.

supporting ‘Cuban’ music - but, in the band’s eyes, because they are a little *too* Cuban; a little too eager to express the socio-cultural situation surrounding them.

Ciro’s lyrics assert that this is an institutional problem, rather than a subcultural one. This presents something of an enforced division between the band and an empathetic, and connected, subculture. The removal from the subculture that Porno Para Ricardo feel, in this song, is presented as the fault of the overbearing interference from the AHS. The *friki* subculture is seen as hamstrung by a censorship that stems from above; willing to incorporate Porno Para Ricardo, to celebrate and align themselves with the ‘most censored band on the island’, but unable to stage the live performances that would facilitate such a real-world encounter. It is Alpidio, and not the *frikis*, who are to blame for this lack of connection. Such an assertion seems to contradict slightly Gorki’s assessment made in ‘Cuba Rebelión’ as noted above. Gorki is much more damning of the supposed *friki* solidarity, indeed he places the fault upon the subculture, rather than (exclusively) upon the government for the dearth of exposure Porno Para Ricardo receive, suggesting that the impetus to vocally and proactively demonstrate a support to Porno Para Ricardo’s overt criticism of hegemonic repression is within the powers of this group, and is not controlled exclusively from above.

Perhaps both Catherine Moses (2000) and Vincenzo Perna’s (2005) separate analyses of a type of self-censorship – both politically and culturally – should be brought into play here in to address this schism between band and subculture:

By remaining participants in the system, Cuban retain the safety net of food, shelter, and healthcare. Dissenting or being seen as a counterrevolutionary in any way can result in the loss of some or all privileges and may lead to imprisonment (Moses, 2000:10).

The Castro regime effectively uses blackmail to create fear and keep people from acting against the regime. If there is something that the state can take from an individual – a professional opportunity, a child’s position in a good school, permission to leave the country, a dollar earning job – it has power over that person. It is to that power that Cubans succumb (Moses, 2000:18-9).

In Cuba, singing a ‘problematic song’ in public, in theory, is not forbidden. What happens, rather, is that the media, by banning specific songs and marginalizing certain artists on the airwaves, pressurize musicians into self-censorship... Institutions... prefer to operate indirectly, by pressurizing musicians into self-censorship, manipulating the media in order to affect artists’ public exposure and economic rating, controlling the artists’ access to state-managed clubs and facilities, and restricting their freedom of movement through the issuing of visas and travel permits (Perna, 2005:91-2).

Often, for fear of severe governmental reprimand that may revoke access to many of the professional and social institutions necessary to work and live, many Cubans operate a policy of at least superficial acquiescence with the Revolution, keeping overtly critical opinions to the sanctity of private space and close (closed) friendship and family circles⁹⁹. Clearly, it is a mode of social self-preservation that Porno Para Ricardo have negated for themselves in their desire to name precisely, directly and vehemently, their concerns, and the causes of these concerns. However, for many other musicians, and perhaps even more so for non-musical members of the subcultures, such a vehement castigation carries the risk of being branded with dangerous epithets such as ‘counterrevolutionary’ or ‘dissident’. Porno Para Ricardo stand as a testament to the fact that such epithets, once ascribed, make the everyday even more problematic and stressful. In a purely pragmatic sense, perhaps many Cuban’s see such open and public defiance as too self-destructive a task, preferring to reserve such complaints and criticisms for the private space of home¹⁰⁰. Many other Cuban rock musicians may feel a strong opposition to many aspects of the regime, their consternations with the negation of their individual and group identities within the space of a national identity may be as strongly felt as those expressed by Porno Para Ricardo, but the determination to break through that hold over the everyday – the willingness to *sacrifice* the everyday – to voice such opinions in the public sphere of Cuban identity may be lacking for any number of personal, and justifiable, reasons.

The grievances Porno Para Ricardo express in the opening verse at not being ‘allowed’ to perform are not necessarily aimed to foster a sort of reacceptance back into the fold, quite the opposite. After the middle verses of the song which relay the more personal attacks on Alpidio Alonso, the final verse makes clear Porno Para Ricardo’s separation from the state infrastructure and their celebration of their position decidedly ‘outside the Revolution’:

*Alpidio Alonso; el jefe al mando de la asociación
el quiere botarnos, y eso es lo mejor que se le ocurrió
no nos hace falta estar en tu mierdera institución
adios imbecil [sic], que sepas que esta banda es la mejor*

Alpidio Alonso; the boss in charge of the association
he wants to throw us out, and that’s the best he could think of
we don’t need to be in your shitty institution
goodbye imbecile, just so you know, this band is the best

The petulance of the statement is perhaps its most powerful weapon, converting a significantly powerful institution, and representation of political and cultural hegemony,

⁹⁹ This topic of the expression of a ‘true’ personal identity being expressed fully in the private sphere, and the disconnect between the public and the private that this has served to create in Cuba, is discussed in Chapters Five and Six.

¹⁰⁰ This division between private and public spaces is discussed in greater depth in Chapter Six.

into a “shitty institution”, and converting the band’s potentially problematic expulsion from the AHS into a positive. Divorced from the institution, Porno Para Ricardo are afforded entirely free rein in their lyrical expressions and thus are able to express entirely and directly their personal identity. Not only is there no *need* to be in this institution, not only is nothing *lost*, but an ability to express themselves clearly, without recourse to political acquiescence is *gained*. By distancing themselves from the AHS (or by having a distance created by the AHS), the band are able to be *more* like themselves, expressing precisely their identity, and can become the ‘best band’. This removal from the institutions of the Revolution affords the band a certain air of authenticity, at least within the mode of being (able to be) true to oneself; an ability to exist (to continue to exist) outside of the all-encompassing system; the system to which many other (rock) musicians seem to at least begrudgingly adhere.

‘La Agencia del Rock’ – ‘Rock Agency’

In the song ‘La Agencia del Rock’ (‘The Rock Agency’), Porno Para Ricardo make overt their disregard for the “*infame asociación*” (‘infamous association’). As noted in Chapter Two, the song lists a series of accoutrements that the ‘*Movimiento del Rock*’ surrounds itself with:

Con sus juntas directivas
Con sus cangrejitos de oficina
Con su escasa proteína
Y sus buenas policies
Con sus mentes de gallina
Sin el Patio de María
Con su Buena represión
Y con su infame asociación...

With their joint directives
 With their little crabs in office
 With their limited protein
 And their great policies
 With their chicken minds
 Without the *Patio de María*
 With their great repression
 And with their infamous association...

*Con el ministro y su peluca*¹⁰¹
Con esos premios Lucas
Con el audio que no suena
Con el viaje de Venezuela
Con la envidia de los puercos
Con Lennon de monumento

¹⁰¹ This line refers to the long-haired minister of culture, Abel Prieto, who is in charge of the rock agency. The (false) claim that the minister wears a wig clearly alludes to the inauthenticity of a government official adopting a clear cultural marker (long hair) of rock music.

*Con sus putas tortilleras*¹⁰²
Estamos fritos en la cazuela

With the minister and his wig
With those Lucas awards
With the audio that doesn't sound
With trips to Venezuela
With the envy of the pigs
With Lennon in monument
With their lesbian bitches
We're fried in the pan

From the small-mindedness and apparent inauthenticity of the leaders, to the hypocrisy of the agency's belated celebration of John Lennon¹⁰³, the 'Rock Movement' is painted as both an entirely anachronistic and obsolescent institution, one that cannot but hamper cultural and political expression. The litany of institutional possessions, all of which are rallied against in the acerbic command of the chorus (*'fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck, el movimiento del rock'*), are considered by the band as unnecessary for a rock identity; "aberrations" of what "rock is" (MLC, 2008). Porno Para Ricardo are deliberately positioning themselves outside of this institutional framework, ridiculing as inauthentic and unnecessary the possessions held by the institution; possessions significantly denied to them through expulsion from the AHS. This list of unnecessary possessions can be viewed as something of a rallying cry to other rock musicians, demonstrating an ability to exist (indeed thrive) outside of the hegemonic institutions, something the band suggest many rock musicians in Cuba appear reticent to attempt. As Gorki's explanation of the ethos behind the band's recently refurbished home recording studio suggests, this desire to remove alternative music from the constraints of the state is of paramount importance:

This studio that we're building is a result of being very conscious of the price that we have to pay for confronting the government and the institutions in this country. To make a recording studio means a lot to us, because it gives us massive autonomy when creating our music. It works for other artists that can come to record in this studio, to give them that opportunity and also to a great extent to demonstrate to them that if we could do it, they can also do it – which means it is possible to have a life outside of the institutions. It is possible to continue creation without the institutions, but people don't think so. Of course they would have to

¹⁰² This rather uncharacteristically derogatory lyric perhaps needs some explanation. Rather than being a homophobic expression of the band themselves, I think this lyrics is put in the mouths of the revolutionaries, and is particularly aimed again at the duplicitous cooption of a previously anti-revolutionary identity. Mariela Castro, daughter of Raúl, has campaigned for gay rights (that is rights 'within the Revolution'), where once to be gay was, as with rock music and other identities, to be often severely persecuted by the state. See appendix for full lyrics.

¹⁰³ As Gorki asserts: "It's incredible that in the 60s people were sent to prison for this [listening to the Beatles] and now, cynically, they have placed a statue [of John Lennon], a monument, in a park... that is just ridiculous. They send you to prison for being ideologically incorrect and then, at the convenient moment for them, they place this statue. How much longer?!" (Gorki, in Cuba Rebelión, 2009).

pay a price like us, they have to take the risk and they have to stop being afraid. They must stop being afraid (Gorki, 2010).

Gorki's words assert the hypocrisy of trying to incorporate rock music into a revolutionary system that has overtly and systematically prohibited and subjugated the genre in all its forms since its inception. Rock and the Revolution are seen as incompatible, and in this incompatibility, the latter is made incapable of representing a sense of Cuban musical identity by enforcing cultural and political constraints upon musicians.

This rallying cry of rejecting institution is augmented in the final line of the first chorus: '*Nunca hubo una revolución*' ('they [the rock movement] never had a revolution'). On first listen, the meaning is overt. Porno Para Ricardo are again voicing the assertion that rock music has no place 'within' *any* hegemonic institutional framework, least of all a Revolution which has consistently denied and subjugated the presence of rock music on the island. Rock music, for Porno Para Ricardo, exists outside of the political landscape of the Revolution; the rock movement has not had *a* revolution as it is not part of *the* Revolution. However, when read alongside the specifically musical critiques provided by the second chorus, and Gorki's words elsewhere on the tendency towards conservatism within institutional music making and Cuban rock music more specifically, another reading can be given to this assertion, one that gives this claim of lacking a revolution perhaps takes on a more cultural, and less political measure. If one takes the concept of a revolution to mean something musical, then the complaint Porno Para Ricardo level at Cuba rock music is that they have not found it necessary to invent new ways of making Cuban music. There is still a conservatism, beholden to past greats and traditional rhythms and styles, that permeates much of Cuban rock, and Porno Para Ricardo see this as getting in the way of defining and reflecting something contemporary within Cuba. Porno Para Ricardo's music, though planted within a recognisable punk framework, is never afraid to push forward¹⁰⁴, to *revolve*, rather than to remain fixated with extolling past genres, past artists and past conceptions of Cubanness.

The second chorus seems to further turn the spotlight of blame away from the small-minded and inauthentic leaders and bureaucrats of the institution, and towards those engaged in music making, claiming both that "*este rock que no suena*" ('this rock doesn't sound') and "*están copiando donde quiera*" ('they are copying whatever they want'). These aesthetic charges of inauthenticity are principal concerns of the band for contemporary rock music made in Cuba. Firstly, Porno Para Ricardo argue, it is not vehement and robust

¹⁰⁴ Evidence of this push forward is given on their latest album, which opens with an original reggaetón track.

enough in its social commentary, and its criticism of the subjugation and censorship that *frikis* have endured, essentially, that it does not *sound* loud enough. Secondly, that in Cuban rock musicians' imitation and deference to foreign fashions and styles, there is something of a lessening of the musical and cultural language necessary to accurately portray contemporary Cuban society and identity. Part of Porno Para Ricardo's motivation is attempting to find a new way of defining Cubanness, one that is radical and original, yet tempered by the need not to mimic styles from abroad, but to create from the resources within. In the band's eyes, the conservatism of belonging to an institution makes the task of presenting this (musically) revolutionary Cuban identity – one of originality, complete freedom and a radically seized ownership of national symbols – totally impossible.

Outside Subculture: 'Black Metal'

Despite their clear and overt opposition to the hegemony of the Revolution, the simplistic binary of 'rock' versus 'the state' – the former an always-already authentic expression of discontent at the inauthenticity of the latter in expressing a contemporary Cuban identity – is severely problematised by the band's apparent contempt for many aspects of *friki* subculture. Porno Para Ricardo's consternations with *friki* culture stem from more than just political affiliations (or acquiescence).

In the song 'Black Metal'¹⁰⁵, the sense of subcultural rock rebellion is portrayed as an impotent fantasy by Porno Para Ricardo, unwilling to meet state repression head-on and to speak candidly about contemporary Cuban concerns. In this criticism, the band do not necessarily present themselves as the only band capable of 'authentic' representation, nor do they suggest that *all* rock music is necessarily inauthentic. Rather, the concern here is with openness and compromise, with self-censorship and metaphor, words and actions. The song introduces the listener to a boundlessly optimistic, if slightly confused, protagonist, voiced by Ciro. The character is one of an archetypal *friki*, as perceived by Porno Para Ricardo; naive, exuberant, eager to claim a 'badness' but unable (or unwilling) to act upon it, and concerned with keeping up to date with the trends and vogues of his adopted subculture. This *friki* gives us a short autobiography in which a remembrance (albeit falsified and fantasised) of youth and an extolment of place are used to cement his identity, to claim his authenticity as a *friki*. But this narrative, when placed in Porno Para Ricardo's hands, is given over to demonstrate the exact opposite. This character is made indicative of a superficial (fantasy, even) imagining of the 'dissident' subcultural (countercultural) movement, eager to talk – to be *seen to talk* – but when power is invoked,

¹⁰⁵ Track 16 on 'Soy Porno, Soy Popular'.

is quick to back down. Ultimately, this characterisation of the *friki* movement portrays precisely Porno Para Ricardo's consternation with aspects of this subculture, and explains their apparent distancing from it.

The opening verse of '*Black Metal*' instantly leaves the listener in no doubt as to authenticity and legitimacy of this *friki* protagonist. Over saccharine chords, reminiscent perhaps of a pop ballad, the *friki*, in sincere spoken word, tells us of his inexorable rise to '*frikidom*':

*Cuando era un niño, era un vampiro
Después cuando crecí descubrí que también era un hombre lobo
Por eso ahora que soy friki lo que me gusta es el...*¹⁰⁶

When I was a boy, I was a vampire
Afterwards, when I grew up, I discovered that I was also a werewolf
Because of that, now I am a *friki*, and what I like is...

The lines that inform us of this *friki*'s hybrid vampiric/lycanthropic upbringing are delivered in an almost nonchalant manner. A brief stumbling over the words (deliberately performed by Ciro) '*hombre lobo*' give the feeling of an imaginative storyteller intent on impressing an audience; invoking his own spurious, augmented past as a way of authenticating his contemporary identity. These two 'discovered' identities from youth are given as the justification for his contemporary, real world persona as *friki*. Perhaps Porno Para Ricardo are linking the three identities. The fantasy characters of badness in youth are made progenitors to the fantasy dissidence of the *friki*. All are adopted personas that do not accurately represent the 'real', nor live up to their promised potency.

There may be something to be said about the misremembering of youth here. Though the *friki* protagonist clearly never was either vampire or werewolf, nor can he really believe that he was, it is interesting to note how this past, misremembered and made fantasy, is used to authenticate a present, real identity; one that purports dissidence and outsider status as integral constituent parts. Perhaps the comment from Porno Para Ricardo is levelled at the authenticity of the *friki* identity (the protagonist of '*Black Metal*' specifically, and the participants in the subculture more generally). Porno Para Ricardo, as with many niche rock musicians, assert their own understanding of the lineage and genealogy of their music as a marker of their own authenticity. And this comprehension of the genre is something that Gorki in particular finds lacking in much *friki* discourse. Speaking of Porno Para Ricardo's nascent days, and live performances, Gorki remembers:

Many people said to us '*compadre*, I'm going to see your band, not because of the music, but because of what you say' that is because of the extra-musical part. Since

¹⁰⁶ See Appendix for full lyrics.

there were people from extreme metal that didn't like punk so much, in spite of the fact that extreme metal came out of punk, but people here don't know anything. (Gorki, 2010)

For Porno Para Ricardo, this knowledge of the genre, its evolution, and its place in establishing the foundations for identity (Gorki's assertion that Led Zeppelin and the Sex Pistols were constant referents in his youth for example, *ibid.*) are made the foundation stones of a rock identity in the present; but a rock identity that is placed *within* a Cuban cultural and social framework. In the *friki*'s account of fantasy – an imagined 'authentic' youth – the *gesture* of authentic accolades for being a *friki* is made, but it is not backed up by substance. The identity is arrived at, rather than formed; appropriated, rather than worked for. As the verse crescendos, the *friki* becomes more animated, his voice jumping an octave to Ciro's delightfully faux-earnest falsetto range, these explicatory markers of assumed authenticity from youth are shed in the face of:

black metal, black metaaaaaal
nosotros somos malos cantidad
black metal, black metaaaaaal
ay ay ay ay ay ay

black metal, black metal
we are really bad
black metal black metal
ay ay ay ay ay

A circularity is expressed: the *friki* listens to black metal because he is 'bad' (authentic), and is 'bad' because he listens to black metal. However, for all his assertions of badness, little substance is given, aside from the fantastical, to support the claim.

The image of the superficially rebellious *friki* is further enhanced by the second verse. Here the *friki* protagonist walks us round the epicentre of 'cool'; the aforementioned 'Parque G' (see Chapter Two). The character here is self-consciously performing his *friki* identity, but to the listener he imparts an almost child-like excitement, giggling and barely able to contain his excitement at the opportunity to '*frikar*' – a verb form of the noun '*friki*':

el otro día por la noche me fuí par la G a frikiar
y saben lo que descubrí (ja ja)
descubrí que hay un piquete nuevo de black metal
enseguida corrí donde Toni para que me lo quemara
y así ser el primero en tenerlo y así ser el más friki de todos los frikis
saben como se llama, se llama...

The other night I went to G to '*frikar*'
And guess what I discovered (ha ha)
I discovered a new black metal band
So I immediately ran to Toni so he could burn me a copy

So I could be the first one to have it
So I could be the most *friki* of all the *frikis*
do you know what it's called, it's called...

The 'discovery' of a new black metal band, and the opportunity to become the first person to own a copy of their CD, is made not so much a musical choice, but almost a fashion accessory. The new CD is to be displayed by the *friki* as an emblem of his '*frikiness*'; his opportunity to be "the most *friki*". Many of the consternations that Porno Para Ricardo have with this subculture raised in Chapter Two hold here. The overreliance on an inert place for authenticity - a place from which little real musical/ subcultural activity, other than the opportunity to be 'seen' - is recounted in this protagonist's glee at walking around the park. This act becomes rebellion – becomes a symbol of authenticity – without any further action. This implied trait is made musical in Porno Para Ricardo's portrayal of the new CD as accessory. The specific music on the CD, the name of the band even (alluded to, as the second chorus answers the question 'do you know what it was called?' with the wailed 'black metal') are irrelevant in the *friki*'s pursuit of the new; they are simple generic: simply 'black metal'. Irrespective of the sound, or the personal affiliation the individual feels to the music, its positioning as new imbues it with the power to convert the *friki* into 'the most *friki*', the 'most authentic'. Porno Para Ricardo present this subculture as a performance of authenticity, a posture of rebellion, without the action to back it up, an assertion which is given a clear voice in the conclusionary chorus of the song:

black metal, black metaaaaal
oh cuánta maldad
black metal, black metaaaaal
empuñamos la espada del mal
black metal, black metaaaaal
no puedo llegar tarde a mi casa porque entonces me regaña mi mamá.

Black metal black metal
Oh, how much badness
Black metal black metal
We grasp the sword of badness
Black metal black metal
I can't arrive home too late, otherwise my mum will tell me off

After the howled allegiance to the genre of black metal, after the insisted assertion of 'badness', even after the return to a fantasy realm where the "sword of badness" is grasped, the *friki*, in abashed tones, reveals a fear of parental reprimand. The juxtaposition of bravado in general, boastful terms, and a timorousness in the face of authority (even familial authority) becomes a telling allegory for how Porno Para Ricardo perceive much of this subculture. As with the complaints levelled at the rock agency, there is an anger at a duplicity of a subculture that ostensibly stands for rebelliousness – if not outright

dissidence – yet adheres to state-run organisation affiliation, and engages in a type of self-censorship that seeks to circumvent governmental reprimand.

A musical juxtaposition is also forged in the wild fluctuation in style between the songs A and B sections. As noted, where the A sections adopt melodious chord progressions and earnest spoken word vocals, the middle section presents a ludicrously over-the-top impersonation of a black metal track, so removed in tone from its saccharine forbear, as to make obvious the incongruity of this amiable A section soundscape with the epithet 'Black Metal'. After a short, distorted riff interrupts the wailed extolment of '*black metaaaal*', the song erupts into a cacophonous noise – one that is very markedly different from Porno Para Ricardo's *other* instances of noise (see Chapter Six). A keyboard plays a drowning, unpleasant tonal cluster, guitars wheel in distorted abandon, drums pound oblivious. Ciro's vocals maintain all of their exuberance, but none of their communicative narrative, flitting from high-pitch shrieks to low, guttural growls. Occasionally the repeated mantra '*black metal*' emerges from the sludge of noise, before disappearing back into incomprehensible howls. As abruptly as it begins, this 'true' sonic picture of black metal is halted, to be replaced by the earnest insistence of badness from the *friki* protagonist.

Musically, the message is clear enough, equating the supposedly 'hard' black metal sound with a sentimental slush; both false, both the same. In a sense, this oscillation between bland musicality, and hopelessly brash chaotic noise presents a sonic equivalent to the incongruity of a 'bad', vampiric *friki* who is scared of his mother. The faux-aggression of the black metal middle section is reduced down to little more than a short burst, a pose in between the acquiescent reality of the unobtrusive, inoffensive spoken word sections. Musically, the song mirrors the journey of the *friki* protagonist himself. Only in the seclusion of '*Parque G*' is the ostensibly 'true' identity performed, and once the park is left, the identity – the noise of rebellion, and the pose of the dissident – is left behind, to be replaced by that of the child scared of reprimand, playing with fantasy images of vampires and werewolves.

Aside from highlighting some of the inauthenticity of the posture of certain aspects of the *frikis* themselves, this middle section reveals something of Porno Para Ricardo's feelings towards the music that some *frikis* have claimed an identification with. This cacophonous burst of unexpected noise speaks to the repeated critique that Porno Para Ricardo level; that this music, in its unaltered, appropriated and emulated form, offers "no communication" either *to* Cubans, *between* Cubans, or *about* contemporary Cuban culture or identity. This black metal section is almost dropped into the middle of the surrounding, but

thematically and musically unconnected, soundscape. It stands out as incongruous, incomprehensible and alien. In itself (that is, leaving aside the meta-narrative that Porno Para Ricardo as performers and critics of the genre bring), this section offers no communication; nothing can be gleaned from the vocals, they are made an impenetrable howl amid tonal clusters. This sits in direct contrast to Porno Para Ricardo's own lyrics which offer a direct, uncompromising critique of contemporary Cuban politics, culture and society (often inflected with a Cuban slang and cultural references): speaking *in* Cuban, *about* Cuba. The black metal noise is seen as both an escape from, and a negation of, a contemporary Cuban field, and thus is defined as incapable of communicating anything about Cuban identity. Gorki's analysis of the Cuban 'rock scene' (such as it is, in his eyes), refers to the overreliance on '*mimetismo*' ('copying') in the subculture; a practice that not only leads to a lack of awareness and relationship to contemporary Cubanness, but also leads to a conservatism musically, and a subservience politically:

That's why I think this is the moment when 'things stop functioning'¹⁰⁷ because art is an intellectual act, many people don't think beyond and get stuck with what is already made; that is the institution and the rules of how to make rock. People... here there is a lot of '*mimetismo*' [copying] a lot of copying of the fashion, of MTV or of what they see, and then, therefore because your mind doesn't see beyond that horizon, you expect institutions to give you everything, because it is a totalitarian regime. The government controls everything, and it likes to think that you have to do everything with it and that everything is politics. (Gorki, 2010)

The noise of an adopted 'black metal' persona follows precisely Gorki's lamentation of the overreliance on '*mimetismo*'. It becomes a style copied, but not cajoled into making sense of a new locality. It is the same argument made (in equally comical terms) in the incomprehensible gibberish of the band's *friki*-inspired cover version of the 'Guns N' Roses' song 'Don't Cry' (see Chapter Four), an emulation of an ostensibly already-authentic musical mode which fails to represent the nuance of its new location, and thus cannot accurately and completely be put to use defining an identity, without the necessary 'translation', and incorporation into a Cuban framework – politically socially and culturally, as well as musically. This is what Gorki means by the criticism of lack of communication; these musics are not 'translated' into a Cuban cultural language. The result is rock music made in Cuba; subtly, but crucially, different from the conception of 'Cuban rock'.

But it is interesting that this charge of copying 'foreign' trends – imitating the 'already cool', 'as seen on MTV' – which is a consternation levelled at 'the mainstream' from the periphery in many different locations where the identity of rock music is contested, is also 'localised' by Porno Para Ricardo. The practice of '*mimetismo*' is made much more insidious,

¹⁰⁷ "*se traba el paraguas*" literally "the umbrella gets stuck".

in Porno Para Ricardo's eyes, by its coterminous conservatism. The desire to replicate existing cultural forms brings an overreliance on anachronistic definitions and rules that govern what constitutes authentic rock music (a frame of discourse similar to that surrounding certain of Cuba's traditional music genres and the conventions governing their performance and reinterpretation). Within the setting of Cuba, where cultural authenticity in this sense is often inextricably tied to political hegemony, the state (and status quo) is left unchallenged, uncontested, and unchanged. The definition of what constitutes 'Cuban music' is preserved in tact; the custodianship over its definition rescinded upon by *friki*s who adopt exclusively the mimicked 'sound from outside', and, which is worse, who self-censor and modulate their own communication – who convert their own asserted identity as countercultural, anti-hegemonic and revolutionary (albeit a drastically different revolution from that of 1959) into little more than a posture, performed at certain places stripped of their proactive potency – as a necessary prerequisite of being able to operate 'within the Revolution', and thus within its music 'industry'.

Conclusion

Perhaps Porno Para Ricardo are something of an island alone; divorced from the archipelagic chain of individualisms Antoni Kapcia so astutely observes came to constitute the notion of a Cuban culture through the Special Period. In Antoni Kapcia's definition, individuals began to define their identity predominantly within the private realm. Individual identities were thus connected (albeit in tacit, submerged ways) by the commonality of a shared cultural, political and social environment. Yet by removing themselves from the revolutionary music institutions such as the AHS and associated rock agency, yet also negating the *friki* subcultures who exist partially within that same system, Porno Para Ricardo appear to be breaking themselves off from this chain of Cubanenesses; this spectrum of Cuban identities – from staunch revolutionary to rebellious *friki* – which all connect, and all form fragmentary elements of a more holistic representation of Cuban identity. By isolating themselves from this archipelago, Porno Para Ricardo may be removing themselves from this socio-political *mêlée*, recanting their position within the Cuban framework. The myriad other examples of reference to Cuban cultural, political and social symbols, and the vehement insistence upon their right to voice a contemporary Cubaness would tend to suggest the exact opposite. Perhaps at least part of their consternation with the organisations – however loosely organised – of both *friki* subculture and governmental cultural agency, is that it is *those groups* that lack the authenticity to speak directly to a contemporary Cuban identity, and to relay and reflect the environment

honestly, accurately and in something approaching (or at least attempting) a totality. Rather than isolating themselves from the archipelago of Cuban culture, perhaps Porno Para Ricardo are questioning the links connecting these other cultural groups to the chain of Cuban identity.

The apparent aversion to notions of belonging to either of these groups in Porno Para Ricardo's work demonstrates their authenticity. It is an authenticity to speak of and about contemporary Cuba, and to assume the mantles of social commentators and custodians of Cuban musical identity. In their disrespect for the bureaucracy and censorship of the AHS (discussed in more depth in Chapter Five), the band are voicing their insistence on being 'true to themselves'. The expression of their identity requires complete and unchecked liberation from any form of outside stricture, censorship or even aesthetic modification. Their home studio, self-run record label and operation entirely outside of the music 'business' runs deeper than sheer necessity; it forms a distinct and crucial aspect of the band's identity¹⁰⁸. To be given free rein over their music, to be entirely true to themselves and the aesthetic they wish to disseminate, is crucial not only for themselves as musicians, but for the promotion of their image of contemporary Cuban society. The institutions, and their myriad members, portrayed in '*Agencia del Rock*' and '*Comunista Chivatón*', aside from being inauthentic, anachronistic and narrow-minded, are seen as obstacles, rather than aides, to authentic musical production; to be avoided, rather than courted (even begrudgingly) in the attempt to make music that expresses some form of commentary upon Cuban life.

Similarly, the band's criticism, parodying of and distancing from the *friki* subcultures, indeed Gorki's questioning the existence of a Cuban rock scene, similarly represents something of a desire to represent themselves as adhering to the 'true to self' model of authenticity. In this instance (though also evoking the desire to exist 'outside of the system', at great personal cost, in order to have complete control over musical production) the authenticity is garnered by Porno Para Ricardo by demonstrating the overreliance upon established frameworks of already authentic musicality (imported from outside) in certain cases of *friki* musicians and subcultural adherents. The *friki* portrayed in '*Black Metal*' is one as adherent to conventions of what constitutes 'authentic' musical expression as the staunchest traditionalist. Thus, he is unable to fully grasp the meaning of the music adopted, nor able to mediate it to reflect a more nuanced individual or subcultural

¹⁰⁸ This home-made aesthetic, the ubiquitous 'DIY' punk aesthetic, is discussed in Chapter Six.

identity¹⁰⁹. In relief, Porno Para Ricardo are made to stand as authentic; crucially moulding the punk music they adopt to better express an individualised and localised narrative. Present in much of Porno Para Ricardo's work is the sense that these rock influences have to be incorporated into the existing Cuban soundscape; indeed that this existing soundscape must be reclaimed and reinterpreted in the desire to define a reinterpreted notion of Cuban identity.

In highlighting the inauthenticities of both the unnecessary, anathematic rock agency, and the (potentially) unrepresentational, non-communicative *friki* subculture, Porno Para Ricardo in a sense present their model of music making as the paradigm (or perhaps extreme pole) of the 'true to yourself' model of authenticity; authentic in both the precision of its presentation of the band's identity, but also in its ability to represent contemporary Cuban society. That they are unwilling to compromise at all to exist 'within the Revolution', incurring the cost of extreme political censorship and social constriction to preserve their total musical liberation, speaks to this uncompromising authenticity to a personal message. Yet in presenting themselves as the paradigm of this 'true to self' framework of authenticity, Porno Para Ricardo assert the ability to provide something of a new template of Cubanness – or perhaps demonstrate that they have the authenticity to mould and mediate this established template, to better suit themselves, or to better reflect 'their' perception of contemporary Cuba. In being true to themselves, they are demonstrating that they are being true to the template (albeit a radically reinterpreted template) of Cubanness.

¹⁰⁹ Again, such a critique of cultural adoption without the necessary understanding, or cultural mediation, is a theme expressed in the song '*Don Crí*', in which the central protagonist could very well be this same fictional *friki*. This song, and surrounding analysis, is addressed in the following chapter.

Chapter Four – Cover Versions

“Dicen que no es vida, esta que yo vivo”

* * *

Gorki is returned to the stage on the shoulders of the roadie. He bathes in applause for a moment, before picking up a new guitar; lipstick red, glistening and cheap, yellow paint daubed over its surface. Slaking towards the microphone, he tells the crowd “this guitar signifies the tyranny [pause for translation] and I’m going to perform an amorous act with her”.

The intended destruction is belied by the glint in Gorki’s eye; the eagerness to begin the amorousness apparent. But first – importantly – the scene must be properly set. If the guitar represents the tyranny, then it must be heard to do so. Unlike the visceral acts of Soviet and Cuba destruction back in Cuba, the nationality of the guitar is not determined; it’s allegiance needs to be sounded out more overtly. And so, with a distortion still rippling over the guitars, with bass still reverberating and drums pounding, the band launch into a rock version of ‘Chan Chan’, the ubiquitous Buena Vista Social Club song; a globally recognisable iteration of ‘Cuban music’.

As the four chords sound, there is a strange cheer from the crowd, in part, I suspect, at the recognition of the song being butchered. Even through the vicious striking of the strings that stalks Gorki’s strumming, there is a certain sentiment to the sound. Gorki smiles, legs spread. I wonder how long he can keep up the foreplay before the amorous massacre begins. He returns to the microphone, and invokes the rural places to cheers from the crowd. But Gorki manages only one half of a chorus, before adlibbing “ay ay ay, detesto la tiranía¹¹⁰” and ripping the guitar off, swinging it from side to side at arm’s length, feedback beginning to swirl and envelop the stage. He begins the real performance.

Three Covers as Points of Identity Construction

Porno Para Ricardo’s oeuvre contains within it only three examples of cover versions¹¹¹. Yet the vast cultural, historical and musical spectrum that these three covers span not only highlights the diverse and often fragmentary elements that may be melded to form a personalised identity, but also lends credence to the assertion that the practice of covering can be a valuable tool through which to examine the process of identity construction. The

¹¹⁰ “I hate the tyranny.”

¹¹¹ There are, however, a number of examples of songs which heavily parody or use aspects from existing songs. ‘La Internacional’ opens with the theme from the communist anthem, ‘Peste a Rata’, as discussed in Chapter Five, references to Carlos Puebla’s ‘La OEA me causa risa’, and ‘Chachacha, qué Malo el Basilón’, discussed in Chapter Six, makes use of the melody of Rosendo Ruiz’s ‘Que rico el Vasilón’. As all of these songs only reference ‘original’ tracks, and thus do not constitute a ‘cover version’ as defined herein, they are not discussed in this chapter.

three songs – a parodic punk rendition of a Soviet cartoon theme song remembered from youth, an anarchic (and lyrically incomprehensible) re-enactment of a rock ballad and an ostensibly faithful, and deadly serious, performance of a bolero standard – all bear some reference to either a historical or cultural moment within a broader definition of Cuban identity.

The edifice of identity that these three examples of cover versions help construct is indeed complex. A number of interconnected points concerning authenticity and musical appropriation, the reinterpretation of established musical codes, and the insertion of newly created codes into existing work as a means to better define the present are revealed. In their cover versions, the band problematise (and suggest additions to) the pool of cultural elements permitted into the space of ‘authentic’ Cuban expression, complicating and augmenting the network of connections between cultural texts that allude to some aspect of Cuban identity. They address the issue of who is given the legitimacy to claim custodianship of this space of Cuban music, and who is afforded the authenticity to perform it. But these cover versions also portray a more personalised cultural map of the band members themselves, helping to point towards a musical and cultural history of both the band members as individuals and Cuba as a nation culturally integrated with other parts of the world, able to glean meaning and shape itself through recourse, albeit via a process of modification and reinterpretation, to ‘foreign’ cultural sources. The politicised myth of autochthonous Cuban musical invention¹¹² is further questioned in Porno Para Ricardo’s eclectic use of source material for cover versions, as they recognise the ability to find meaning, indeed to find oneself represented, in the cultural materials from outside Cuba. However, once more the band make clear the necessity to reinterpret these cultural materials from outside; to integrate them into a Cuban framework, to put them to work defining and understanding *Cuban* society and identity, and they are ready to highlight the inauthenticity that comes from not engaging fully in this process. In this sense their radical selection of a scant few songs from seemingly incongruous cultural sources points towards

¹¹² By the phrase ‘the myth of autochthonous Cuban musical invention’, I am referring to the often tacit, but nonetheless ubiquitous, politicised notion of what constitutes an authentic Cuban identity that is propounded by the Revolution. It is often difficult to pin down precisely the elements that constitute this ostensibly unifying, and singular, sense of Cuban cultural identity, although I try to outline some of its key ingredients in ‘Outside the Revolution; Everything’ (2012:5-19). Rafael Hernandez and Haroldo Dilla (1992) discuss the concept of threads connecting Cuban political culture back to its inception, Catherine Moses (2000) discusses the suspicion with which the Cuban government has treated external cultural sources, and Raúl A. Fernandez (1994) attempts to demonstrate the isolated nature of Cuban musical production. These texts, and many more besides, discuss the notion of Cuba as an isolated, and self-contained cultural island, capable of being defined entirely through recourse to its ‘autochthonous’ cultural products, and the political motivations behind such a rhetoric.

a deliberate cultural bricolage; one that is consistently designed to interpret, define and renegotiate issues surrounding what constitutes a Cuban identity.

‘Covering’: Some Key Theories

The place of the cover version within popular music is as complex as it is ubiquitous. Yet one crucial, and equally ubiquitous, concept can be seen to thread its way through these generically and ideologically diverse practices: authenticity. As discussed in the previous chapter (p. 81), “the modern romantic notion of authenticity – creating out of one’s own resources” that Deena Weinstein suggests, has become “dominant over the idea that authenticity constitute[s] a relationship, through creative repetition, to an authentic source” (1998:142) in, in many respects, one that can be seen running prevalently through much of Porno Para Ricardo’s music and identity. Their fiercely protective, DIY aesthetic, their reluctance to inculcate themselves into state-run ‘industry’, their apparent parody of subcultural affiliation, their independence and their mantra of discussing socio-political issues in blunt and uncompromising manner, all speak to this concept of being ‘true to oneself’.

Such a stance would appear to leave little authenticity, and little scope for the construction of a personalised identity, within the practice of covering, where the repetitions and allusions to ‘authentic templates’ are at least made more overt. Perhaps the cover version, within this “modern romantic” notion of authenticity prevalent within certain rock discourses, is seen as an inauthentic musical expression; one that cannot speak *for* the coverer. However, in Porno Para Ricardo’s work, as in many examples of punk globally, covering and pastiche are crucial aspects of constructing both a sense of self, and a sense of authenticity. As Gabriel Solis asserts, the act of covering is deeply engrained with the dual concepts of authenticity and identity construction:

The importance of this authenticating function of covers cannot be stressed too much. It may be counter-intuitive to think that covering someone else’s work could be a way to establish personal authenticity, but it is nonetheless true... Authenticity is the single most important rock discourse, so it should come as no surprise that it plays a fundamental role in discussions of covers (2010:300-1).

Cover versions complicate the construct of rock authenticity at the same time as they rely on it. For, as well as the ‘personal authenticity’ that Solis sees in the cover version, there is often a practice of authenticating style or genre, either by remaining faithful to an ‘original’ and thus illustrating its continued relevance, or by de-authenticating the original through parody or changing genre and thus giving a kind of authenticity-in-relief to the styles and

symbols of the 'new' version. Perhaps covering might even be said to be authenticating identity.

In the following section, I wish to raise some of the key theories important to this idea of not just 'cover versions', but to the practice of 'covering'. In much the same way that Christopher Small's highly influential work on the term 'musicking' (1998) seeks to include a variety of actors as integral to the process of music making, so too the idea of covering includes a number of texts, musicians, times, spaces, identities and authenticities into a complex web of meaning. Through the complex intertextual relationships the cover (and coverer) enter into, the practice of 'covering' can not only prove a useful tool for analysing the identity of the coverer, but may also act as a prism through which to assess cultural change and contemporary mores. Presented below are just some of the interrelated theoretical considerations that are often at work in the process of covering.

Repetition and Recollection

Popular music, as many theorists have asserted, is often defined by its temporality; its ability (its desire) to define the epoch in which it was made. In this sense, the act of covering may appear at best as nostalgic homage; paying respect to the established codes of authenticity and the pantheon of past 'greats', or at worst anachronistic; needlessly repeating cultural codes from a distinct past (however close). Certainly Weinstein's definition of authenticity in popular music as creation from "one's own resources" would suggest that the acts of recollection and repetition are almost diametrically opposed to contemporary identity construction and authenticity. Yet both recollection and repetition exist simultaneously in the act of covering as means of constructing identity. Though both these practices are, however tacit, integral to all musical production, in the process of covering, they are brought to the fore; made overt, and in so doing, the listener is made to address the *difference* inherent in repetition. As James Snead notes:

Whenever we encounter repetition in cultural forms, we indeed are not viewing "the same thing," but its transformation, not just a formal ploy, but often the willed grafting onto culture of an essentially philosophical insight about the shape of time and history (Snead, 1981:146).

The shape of time and history (and, importantly, of culture) that covering describes is at least partially cyclical. Rather than a one-way stream that looks back in remembrance, or looks forward in innovative new creation, the cover connects the past and present dialogically; affecting both. As Kierkegaard claims of this dual process of repetition and recollection:

Repetition and recollection are the same movement, just in opposite directions, because what is recollected has already been and is thus repeated backwards, whereas genuine repetition is recollected forward (Kierkegaard, [1843] 2009:19).

In covering, these two movements can be seen at once, both asserting the prominence of repeated musical codes in the present, and simultaneously shifting the meanings of those codes; both in the present, and in our understanding of them in the past.

Multimodality and Intertextuality

Covering opens a more overt connection with the past, but also opens up a more overt network of dialogues between musical texts, not only between the original and the cover, but between genres and epochs. As Jonathan Culler asserts “to read is always to read in relation to other texts, in relation to the codes that are the products of these texts and go to make up a culture” (1981: 11-12), and a similar process is made apparent in the direct relationship between texts in covering.

The new codes of meaning that covering create come not only from repetition or from creating new texts, but also from making new and overt intertextual connections. These connections link not only discrete musical texts – the original and cover – but also act temporally, spatially and cross-culturally, creating links between non-musical texts as well. If, as Jonathan Culler suggests “literature is not a simple aggregate of discrete works but a conceptual space which can be coherently organised” (1981:7), an assertion that seems to ring true for popular music, then these intertextual connections help to establish a framework of understanding around which the cover can begin to make its meaning. As John Frow notes, the early conception of intertextuality:

...was not restricted to particular textual manifestations of signifying systems but was used, rather, to designate the ways in which a culture is structured as a complex network of codes with heterogeneous and dispersed forms of textual realisation (Frow 1990:47).

This theory of intertextual networks of codes proves useful in describing the cover as a text that relies precisely on these links for its meaning. Rather than the notion of a self-contained musical text which is ‘given over’ to the listener with a fixed and determined meaning, the overt intertextuality of covering makes clear the ever-present complexity of making meaning from musical texts. Covering relies on the coverer’s previous experiences and knowledge (and not just musical knowledge) but also on the listener’s set of experiences and knowledge. It is a process which Roland Barthes makes apparent in his work on texts, suggesting that “texts, rather than simply being consumed, are “played” and

“played with” (Barthes, 1977:162), a point which Solis uses to suggest that “texts are objects of art that invite, in fact that require, agency on the part of the reader” (Solis, 2010:306-7). And so, in the practice of covering, there are at least two levels of ‘playing’ at work – two sets of intertextual links – one existing between the coverer (and his/her identity) and that of the ‘original’, and then between the listener and the cover (not to mention the implied intertextual ‘play’ between the listener and the original, and how the cover can ‘play with’ these pre-existing connections).

This intertextual map, so overtly expressed in covering, but indicative of more covert, yet equally present practices in other forms of popular music, demonstrates how listener identity – and also coverer identity - can be expressed through the music of others:

Rather than seeing texts as carriers of intertextual references to other textual forms which may be coded in one of several textual modes, intertextual readings now comprise the many different social and cultural reference points which viewers use in the process of making meaning. This does not deny the text any of its multimodal complexity. But an analysis of how meanings are made by readers/viewers must now also incorporate the intertextual reference points which they bring to bear in their engagements with the text.

Multimodal readings are thus by definition multiple and open to divergence, according to knowledge, attitudes and beliefs of viewers (Meinhof and Van Leeuwen, 2000:62).

In the act of covering, the musician – the coverer – in a sense becomes both the audience and the maker of a new text; responding to the original ‘text’ with his/her own set of attitudes and beliefs, making a meaning from the original, but also presenting that new text to a variegated network of listeners to make their own meaning from. This leads to myriad *potential* meanings being housed not within the musical texts, but around it, in the network of connections the individual creates.

This process of intertextual ‘play’ and multiple meanings is given a further dimension in the type of “*genre resetting*” cover versions discussed by Michael Rings; that is “the presenting of a song in a genre different from that of the original” (2013:55), a practice familiar in covering¹¹³. Rings writes that, because of its “allusive nature, genre resetting in covers can also generate a more hermeneutic brand of interest by providing an intertextual dimension that may serve to enrich a listener’s interpretive engagement with the song, a potential that may be exploited for a wide variety of effects by the covering musician” (2013:56) but which may, as noted above, result in a wide range of *contrasting affects* on the *listeners*. The bringing together of otherwise temporally, musically and ideologically disparate genres in

¹¹³ The practice of ‘genre resetting’ is particularly apparent in punk covers, and it is a practice used - and, perhaps most shockingly *not* used - by Porno Para Ricardo in their cover versions, as discussed below.

cover versions serves not only to reemphasise or reconstruct the identities associated with the original, but to increase, as Solis notes, the set of connections between them; to both complicate, and make more robust, the network of musical connections between texts, genres and identities:

As musicians cover songs from outside their own style and genre, they effectively lay down increasingly broad links between themselves and others. Through this process individual musicians come to be connected to denser and denser networks where reference connects them to referenced music and musician, but also to others who reference similar music and so on (2010:300).

These increasingly broad, and increasingly varied, routes between musical texts provide individual maps of musical exploration, whereby meanings can be moulded and identities can be shaped as the listener makes their way through these intertextual networks.

Crucial to this multiplicity of meanings is the multimodality of the cover:

Multimodality... is conceived as the interaction of different modes, each contributing different elements of meaning, which may or may not support one another... It is... perfectly feasible that the relationship between different modes is conflictual rather than supportive or complementary (Meinhof and Van Leeuwen, 2000:61-2).

In the interaction between, and reconfiguration of, these modes, a number of contrasting, yet equally valid, meanings may be given to the cover. These modes within covering are more than just musical – genre, timbre, instrumentation, performance characteristics etc – though these are of paramount importance in establishing new intertextual connections. One also needs to consider the broader historical, cultural, and social issues (of both the original and the cover, and the variations between these two), the geographical, linguistic and lyrical¹¹⁴ modes.

A cover song iterates (with more or fewer differences) a prior recorded performance of a song by a particular artist, rather than simply the song itself as an entity separate from any performer or performance (Weinstein, 1998:137).

As Dai Griffiths concurs, even “a ‘straight’ cover with little alteration can alter meaning simply because the historical or cultural context of the performance or its recording changes” (2002:52). It is not only repetition of isolated musical material which is at work, but the establishment of a relationship between musicians. A cover version seeks to iterate the work of another musician, and as such, create a commentary upon that work and its pertinence to the new setting into which it is brought. Extending Weinstein’s above definition, I would tend to suggest that covering seeks to iterate many of the implicit

¹¹⁴Changes in lyrics, particularly where gender is concerned, are crucial to discussions of covering more broadly, but are not addressed explicitly in this work as they do not pertain to *Porno Para Ricardo*’s covers. The substitution of gender in cover versions, and the changes to meaning they make are discussed, in part, by Dai Griffiths in the work “Cover Versions and the Sound of Identity in Motion” (2002).

features of the identity (or identities) associated with the time, space and cultural position of the original. Historical and social associations, wider cultural tropes, identity markers of time, place and individual personalities, and crucially established constructions of authenticity are all brought to bear upon a cover version.

‘Coterritorialisation’

A process of redefining, and reconstructing the meanings of, established cultural codes could bring to mind the oft-cited Deleuzian concept of ‘reterritorialisation’, a process in which the barriers of an established space are dismantled, the links between place and culture are problematised, and new meanings are given to culture, and the space is ‘reterritorialised’. In a type of cover version particularly prevalent in punk musics, in which the cover appears to be parodying the cultural codes of the original as a way to demonstrate its inauthenticity and inability to ‘speak’, unmediated, to contemporary cultural concerns, this process of ‘reterritorialisation’ is perhaps most apparent¹¹⁵. As Deena Weinstein suggests “through parody, the punk cover attacked the conventions of authenticity in rock as pompous, pretentious and (laughably) lame” (1998:144). By stripping the original of its veneer, the codes of authentic musical performance are dismantled. What is tacitly accepted as a symbol of the ‘sincere’ in the original – Sinatra’s laid-back crooning style in the inept hands of Sid Vicious, for example – is shown to be an anachronistic gimmick. In so parodying the original, the definition of authenticity is renegotiated (often *by* the coverer, to *include* the coverer).

However, covering does not always attempt to entirely deauthenticate the original (the act of covering in itself admits that the original is still of some relevance in the contemporary setting, however scathing of the source material the cover seems to be), nor does it attempt to entirely deterritorialise and deconstruct the codes inherent in the original. Nor even is the desire to completely reterritorialise that identity space through the enforced addition of the self. Perhaps covering speaks more of an attempt at ‘co-territorialisation’. The cover seeks to establish new meanings and shed new light on conventions and established codes in music, but does not seek to erase those that already exist, as the cover draws its significance from the recognition (and, through parody, the subversion) of those same existing codes. As Steve Bailey, writing on the prevalence of the ‘ironic cover album’

¹¹⁵ The most often cited example of the parodic punk cover version is undoubtedly the Sex Pistols cover of ‘My Way’ in which “Sinatra’s swaggering paean to individualism” (Rings 2013:55) and sincere crooning style are rendered anachronistic. However, this parodic play in cover version finds its way into other genres of music, and the Pet Shop Boys’ dance covers of the Elvis Presley song ‘Always on My Mind’ and the U2 song ‘Where the Streets Have No Name’ are discussed by Mark Butler (2002).

observes, parody and irony neither attempt to pledge fidelity to, nor to completely dismiss, their ‘originals’:

The new versions tend to ridicule the originals, often exaggerating particularly dated or embarrassing aspects of a given song, but, at the same time, they tend to celebrate the continued vitality, despite the short comings, of the music and its importance to the rock audience. This is not “making fun” in a monolithic sense, nor is it pure validation, but rather an uneasy and thoroughly ironic hybrid (2003:142).

For the existing meanings to be destroyed, or usurped, would be to sever the cover from its original, and thus render the process redundant. What covering achieves is something of a parallel string of meanings, the “denser and denser networks” of connections Solis discusses (2010:300), which rely upon the (continued) existence of established meanings, but which operate as a commentary alongside them.

‘Drawing’

In concluding this brief summary of some of the key terms of covering, I turn to Roland Barthes’ work on drawing:

Drawing..., even when denoted, is a coded message... The operation of the drawing (the coding) immediately necessitates a certain division between the significant and the insignificant: the drawing does not reproduce *everything*... without its ceasing, however, to be a strong message... In other words, the denotation of a drawing is less pure than that of a photograph, for there is no drawing without style (Barthes, 1977:43).

Once more there is use in the substitution of terms, and Barthes’ division of the significant and insignificant in the changed-repetition – the partial reproduction – is equally applicable to covering as it is to drawing. An existing text is brought into a new multimodal setting in which new meanings can be created and new identities can be formed around those new meanings. But these connections do not always usurp or discredit the existing network of intertextual relationships the original text has. Rather the cover establishes new connections which, though impacting upon the understanding of the original, often run parallel to these established meanings. Covering brings to the fore processes which are apparent in much of popular music, and establish a framework for analysing the ways in which identity is constructed through recourse to popular music.

Outlining an Identity

In the following three cases studies of Porno Para Ricardo’s cover versions, the effects of the above outlined processes will be addressed, particularly in relation to the band’s own identity, and what it may reveal of contemporary Cubanness. But also, some of the

intertextual connections and multimodal (and para-musical) associations developed between and around the original text and the cover, will be discussed, including relationships to (political) history, imported culture, subcultural practice, remembrance, and issues of tradition and custodianship of ‘authentic’ codes of Cubanness.

The three songs Porno Para Ricardo have covered stem from very different places, and reflect the diverse range of fragments that help constitute their bricolage, yet vehemently Cuban, identity. The first, from the band’s debut album, is a cover version of the opening song from the Soviet cartoon ‘*Los Músicos de Bremen*’; a staple of Cuban children’s television in the 1970s and 80s. The second, on ‘*Soy Porno, Soy Popular*’, ‘pays homage’ to the ‘Guns N’ Roses’ classic rock ballad ‘Don’t Cry’, and the third, on ‘*El Disco Rojo Desteñido*’, is a cover of Cuban bolero standard ‘*Mucho Corazón*’. These three diverse musical examples demonstrating the broad spectrum of musical influences the band hold as constituent parts of their identity, and hint at the complex network of intertextual connections through which such identities are constructed. By augmenting the field of musical references used to describe their conception of Cubanness, the band establish new intertextual connections. They attempt to bring ‘forgotten’, ‘foreign’ and ‘familiar’ texts into the network of national identity, connecting together often disparate histories and geographies. These newly forged networks of cultural connections, in a sense, subvert both the notions of ownership (or custodianship) of Cuba’s traditional genres of music – defiant symbols of national identity – and, somewhat paradoxically, the inauthenticity of mimicry and defining an identity with recourse to ‘borrowed’ musical and cultural practices.

“*Los Músicos De Bremen*”: An Other Strand of Cuban Heritage

The relationship that Porno Para Ricardo insist upon remembering between Cuba and the Soviet Union (or perhaps more accurately, the relationship between themselves as children, aspects of Soviet culture, and the impact those personal and political facets have had upon the present) discussed in Chapter One are brought to bear most overtly in a musical sense in their cover version of the opening song from a Soviet Cartoon translated into Spanish as ‘*Los Músicos de Bremen*’. Though Porno Para Ricardo have treated this catchy song to their usual anarchic and haphazard style – fluid rhythm, bellowed choruses and deliberately ‘messy’ aesthetic – their cover version is strangely tender, helped in no small part by Ciro Diaz’s faux-sincerity and falsetto register when singing the Russian lyrics. The cartoon – a twenty minute retelling of the Brothers Grimm tale – was made in 1969 and, along with a plethora of Soviet cartoons imported to Cuba, became immensely popular with Cuban

children throughout the 1970s¹¹⁶. It is no exaggeration to suggest that such cartoons became as recognisable and as integral to the map of cultural references for this generation of Cubans as they did for the same generation in the Soviet Bloc.

Extending Weinstein's assertion that the cover version iterates more than just musical elements, it is almost as if Porno Para Ricardo are covering of this period of Cuba's Soviet-inflected history; both in the sense that they are remembering and retelling a significant (and often marginalised) aspect of Cuba's recent history, and in the sense that they are re-enacting a familiar text in order to re-establish new intertextual connections, bring new meanings and augment the palette of national identity.

Of the three covers discussed here, stylistically, this cover strays furthest from its original text¹¹⁷. While the original maintains a galloping beat and jovial tone throughout, Porno Para Ricardo's version begins in a much more tentative style. Two clean electric guitars, one picking chords, the other providing the melody, begin confidently, then seem to grind to a halt, buckling instantly under their own sincerity perhaps? The singing comes in, accompanied by a strummed electric guitar. Only then does it become clear what the song is; the point of reference becomes apparent. However, where the original is confident and blithe, the cover, in this tentative opening stanza, seems fragile. The voice, though pure in tone, seems uncertain, as though feeling for something, remembering something. Gradually the rest of the band join in, so by the end of the first verse, the solo voice is joined by a chorus. Buoyed and steadied, the song is abruptly punctuated. Serenity and timorousness are instantly replaced with boisterousness and tumult. Guitars have a white-noise buzz to their distortion, the frantic hi-hat plays insistently, yet never totally accurately, the voice is transformed from feeling for something half-remembered to grasping it tightly. The remainder of the track plays out with much the same revelry and joy as the original, albeit within a blazing, anarchic punk soundworld.

This act of covering clearly seeks, for a *certain* audience at least, to cover a specific tendril of a shared, yet tacit, Cuban past. It is a repetition and reclamation of, and reconnection to, a confoundingly complex and multimodal cultural text back into network of contemporary Cubanness. Though it revels in the classic punk parodic soundworld, there is a tenderness and affiliation with the original. The intention is clearly not to de-authenticate the specific

¹¹⁶ An upload of this cartoon, with a plethora of nostalgic remembrances in Spanish from expat Cubans, can be found here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3OpKWLflfoU>

¹¹⁷ Porno Para Ricardo's version, with the music video discussed below, can be found here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lkqDDIUFPMo>. Their 'live' version on Cuban television can be found here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zjsLuUHmvfg>

source, but to comment upon the (cultural) incongruity of the remembrance, and the presence of the original in Cuban cultural memory, but also, as discussed in Chapter One, to highlight and critique the omission and de-authentication of these Soviet sources in regards to Cuban identity in the period following the policy of ‘Zero Option’¹¹⁸.

Laura García Freyre has suggested that Porno Para Ricardo are attempting to “reject the imposition of Soviet culture that existed in Cuba” (2008a:550) through their ironic and subversive references to it, and this is certainly partially true. However, the cover version of ‘*Músicos de Bremen*’ does not contain nearly as much contempt for the subject matter as do other examples of the type of parodic punk cover version discussed by Weinstein. Nor is this cover as acerbic in its remembrances of the Soviet legacy in Cuba as perhaps other manifestations of ‘Russia’ within the band’s work are¹¹⁹. Porno Para Ricardo’s ‘*Músicos de Bremen*’ does not seek to present the original as “laughably lame” (Weinstein, 1988:144). There would seem to be little point in making a cartoon theme tune risible, nor in presenting Soviet culture as ‘lame’, since its demise, both globally and specifically within Cuban national remembrances, is obvious. Porno Para Ricardo are not mocking this source, they are engaging in a more complex identity construction, one that seeks to remember as much as reject the Soviet legacy in Cuba. As James Snead suggests:

“Culture” in its present usage always also meant the *culture*¹²⁰ of culture: a certain continuance in the nurture of those concepts and experiences which have helped or are helping to lend self-consciousness and awareness to a given group (1981:147).

In the act of remembering a Soviet cultural product, the band are engaged in a complex negotiation with the transplanted, then excised, cultural markers taken from the Soviet Union; symbols that were absorbed into the patchwork of personal (and national) identities throughout the band’s childhood, whilst other, perhaps more ‘readily intelligible’, cultures were denied to them through censorship. These cultural markers were then removed and made illegitimate in their adulthood¹²¹. This is a song that attempts to ‘cover’ and perhaps even ‘cultivate’ aspects of a childhood identity, and past Cuban culture, remembering and contemporising cultural connections to better define a Cuban identity.

The song, and the accompanying music video, are both peppered with signifiers of Soviet culture, personal childhood remembrances and the everyday of contemporary Cuba, creating a truly multimodal *mis en scène* which reinforces the connections between Cuban

¹¹⁸ See Introduction, p.20, also see Betancourt (1991).

¹¹⁹ Particular examples of the band’s more aggressive stance towards remembering the Soviet Union come in their phallic-hammer-and-sickle logo, and the destruction of Russian guitars on stage.

¹²⁰ Snead’s work addresses the etymology of the word culture, and ‘cultivation’ (1981:147).

¹²¹ This censorship includes not only foreign musics, but also the music of Cuban artist living outside of Cuba, artists who were written out of the pantheon of Cuban greats (see Eric Silva Brenneman, 2004).

past, 'borrowed' cultural symbols from outside Cuba, and a Cuban present. In the video, the band, dressed in primary school uniforms¹²², can be seen playing their instruments in a classroom. A television plays cartoons. A school map shows, in resplendent red, the U.S.S.R. At the end of the song, Ciro Diaz shouts a series of Russian words enthusiastically (translated phonetically into Spanish pronunciation and flashed onto the screen), invoking Russian lessons at school. All these nostalgic images are juxtaposed against the protagonist of the video, a young woman, who is seen battling against the inconveniences of everyday life in Cuba. Her phone doesn't work, she has to hitch-hike to her destination, eventually getting a lift on a bicycle (which she has to help carry in return). Also prevalent in the video are a number of shots of people just waiting for 'something' to happen; playing cards, sunbathing, or just hanging out. All this plays out against the inescapable degradation of Cuba's buildings and infrastructure.

The resultant message is striking. *Porno Para Ricardo* link the nostalgic images of the past (Russia) with the inescapable struggle of the present. They are making a pointed criticism of the over-reliance on the Soviet Union politically, economically and culturally, in Cuba's past and the ways in which this uneasy political allegiance, and the stubborn shutting out of other parts of the world, has left Cuba a politically isolated, and in many senses, eroding island alone. Yet in the act of remembering, the band are recognising the impact the Soviet Union has had upon their cultural 'map' of influences, and thus upon their contemporary identity. Whereas the Soviet Union may have been wiped off the map – literally and metaphorically - in relation to the set of legitimate cultural influences which are seen as constituting the parameters of 'Cubanness' for many, *Porno Para Ricardo* are attempting to 'reach back' to reconnect with an element of their childhood that was, at one point, a permissible cultural landmark but which has since, for distinctly political reasons, been denied a place within the space of Cuban identity. They are contesting the notion that the past can be denied a place in the present because it is deemed unwelcome. By recognising the integral part Soviet culture has played in the shaping of their identity, however unwelcome it may have been in the first instance, 'Russianness' is made an important part of the band's identity, and part of what may be termed a 'generational Cuban identity', and it is given back its pertinence in understanding the often frustrating scenarios that constitute the everyday in Cuba. In this way, *Porno Para Ricardo* could be said to be

¹²² All primary school children wear the same uniform throughout Cuba, thus the image is a potent one, and instantly recognisable to all Cubans.

‘cultivating’ a sense of Cuban culture through covering, tending to these forgotten parts of Cuba’s cultural ‘garden’¹²³ and asserting their significance in understanding the present.

“Don Cri”: The Inauthenticity of ‘Mimetismo’

In the covering of one of the classics from the rock canon - ‘Don’t Cry’ by ‘Guns N’ Roses’ - lead guitarist Ciro Díaz again takes on the mantle of ‘front man’ with the same faux-earnest delivery as in ‘*Músicos de Bremen*’. From the moment the distorted bass plays its descending pattern, heralding a howl of guitar feedback (albeit much less restrained and ‘controlled’ than in the original; more wild shriek than plaintive wail) it is obvious what song is being performed, and the implied intention of a ‘faithful’ rock cover version is clear: one of the gods of the pantheon of rock is being invoked, being claimed and adulated¹²⁴.

But as Ciro begins to sing, something sounds wrong. He begins by apparently attempting a studied imitation of Axl Rose’s intimate, confessional style of singing, but it is embellished by an almost child-like eagerness and barely contained excitement, revelling in the task (the duty? The responsibility?) of recreation. The words are hyper-pronounced to the point of unintelligibility; Ciro seemingly emphasising each and every letter, such is the importance of the text. Either that or he has learnt the lyrics phonetically and, oblivious of the actual meaning, repeats them in this Cubanised form without concerning himself with the actual words or their meaning. The words become sounds, studied not for their informational content (such as it may be), but for the exactness of emulating Axl Rose, and as such become so much noise; incomprehensible to the performer, and unintelligible to the listener. The effect of this inaccurately copied lyrical texts is to blur the message, to make it unreadable in the delivery of its literal meaning. What the lyrics are *about* becomes impossible to comprehend. Similarly, the musical accompaniment to these garbled lyrics, in its over-eager desire to repeat the ostensibly already-authenticated soundworld of Guns N’ Roses, warps itself away from precision. Notes hit too forcefully, jumping the beat, detuning and appearing on the verge of collapse, the structure seems wafer-thin.

¹²³ Important to read alongside this metaphor of cultural cultivation would be Tim Edensor’s critique of Ernest Gellner’s theory of ‘garden cultures’ (Gellner, 1983:7, in Edensor, 2002:3) as discussed in Chapter One. As has been discussed in previous chapters, and as will be further addressed below in relation to Porno Para Ricardo’s cover of a bolero standard, this is often precisely the practice that the band rally against in their definition of Cuban identity. However, that the Soviet *cultural* legacy has become such an untended part of Cuba’s ‘garden culture’ allows it to stand out from other, more closely surveyed parts, and the shift in meanings Porno Para Ricardo ascribe to these cultural codes makes the notion a useful one in this instance.

¹²⁴ A music video for this song, with many more parodic symbols of the power ballad, and sincere rock star (specifically Axl Rose) can be found here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JXtSKu828Z4>

Of course this isn't the 'real' *Ciro* singing, nor the 'real' *Porno Para Ricardo* performing. It is a characterisation; a manifestation, as *Porno Para Ricardo* see it, of the archetypal *friki* and band. It is a multi-layered performance. *Ciro* performs an archetype of a 'sincere' (yet necessarily inauthentic) *friki* who is also performing the identity of an American(ised) rocker by pretending to *be* Axl Rose. The artificiality of the performed identity is given away in the very last utterance of the song. After a histrionic and increasingly ludicrous outro in which *Ciro* (as the *friki*) howls in melismatic fashion, the song ends, and *Ciro* clears his throat in a manner that either shows the *friki* calming himself down and regaining restraint at the end of the (artificial) performance, or else it is the 'real' *Ciro* giving a *sotto voce* commentary on the same ludicrousness of the 'authentic' virtuosic rock wail. This same characterisation can be found in the equally comical (though equally pointed social commentary of) '*Black Metal*'¹²⁵ in which the *friki* parades around *Parque G* trying to find the latest black metal band, and espousing his own coolness. In '*Don Cr?*' it is as if the same character, having proved himself a member of the *frikis* at *Parque G*, has now formed a band and is further proving his authenticity by paying homage to a innately authentic musical source.

The critique is overt. That in the appropriation of a distinctly US music, in the covering of English lyrics, this Cuban *friki* has identified himself through a music without making the necessary mediation and contextualisation; assuming that the music, because of its perceived authenticity in the US, is able to be imported and adopted wholesale. It is a telling characterisation, one that invokes D.C. Muecke's sense of "self disparaging irony":

The ironist is presented not simply as an impersonal voice, but, in disguise, as a person with certain characteristics. And the sort of person the ironist presents himself as being is our guide to his real opinion... But his disguise is meant to be penetrated, and our judgement is directed not against the ignorance of the speaker but against the object of the irony (Muecke, 1969:87, in Steve Bailey, 2003:144).

The object of irony in '*Don Cr?*' is more than just this characterised *friki*, it is the entire *friki* culture and their appropriation of American rock music as always already authentic and able to define a Cuban identity without any mediation whatsoever, despite the incomprehensibility of the lyrics. In searching for an authentic rock identity, this imaginary *friki* band covering Guns N' Roses have rendered themselves inauthentic by negating their Cubanness. The critique here is not necessarily of an inauthentic addition to the Cuban soundscape – Guns N' Roses – but of an insufficient cooption of this musical source into the intertextual network of Cuban musical culture and identity that already exists. This is almost a cover version of cover version, where the "denser and denser networks" (Solis,

¹²⁵ On the same album, '*Soy Porno, Soy Popular*'. This track is discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

2010:300) of texts are not augmented, but circumvented, where texts are not ‘played with’, but transplanted. The incomprehensibility of the lyrical reproduction here speaks to this need to translate and locate music within its new cultural context for it to make sense.

Certainly language is central in ‘locating’ music and its ability to become a constituent part of one’s identity – either group or individual. Gorki recounts the nascent days of his own band:

At the time I started the group, I saw that a lot of bands would play the song on stage and then the next song, and there was no contact, and on top of that they would sing in English – allegedly – and also guttural [impersonation of heavy metal voice] and so I saw that there was no communication with that music. So I said ‘if I want to listen to the music I like, I will have to create my own band’ (Gorki, 2010).

Presenting an ironic cover of an American rock ‘classic’ firstly attempts to burst this bubble of pre-ordained authenticity; attempting, to “deconstruct the original... removing and/or exaggerating the pretty, the pompous, and the pop” (Deena Weinstein 1998:144). It also provides, through this ironic voice, a commentary on the *friki* culture to assert, again as does John Shepherd, that music “does not ‘carry’ its meaning and ‘give it’ to participants and listeners. Affect and meaning have to be created anew in the specific social and historical circumstances of music’s creation and use” (1993:138). But it also asserts the necessity for reference to the very factors found in example one – the local, quotidian, memories and place – in defining an authentic identity. Rock music is, for Porno Para Ricardo, incapable of ‘carrying with it’ a sense of rebellion, even in the often draconian cultural context of a repressive regime intent on presenting Cuban music as exclusively autochthonous¹²⁶.

Porno Para Ricardo’s cover suggest that, by taking English-language rock music at ‘face value’ and using it unmediated in collective identity construction, this characterised *friki* is failing to construct an identity that ‘speaks’ to his surroundings, and which fails to communicate a ‘true’ identity. Both Gorki and Ciro assert the necessity of local linguistic communication (that is speaking *of* Cuba by speaking *in* ‘Cuban’):

The band wouldn’t work in another country as it could work here it’s made for the people that live in this country. Not by intention, but by disgrace fatalism – because it was given to us - and so we talk about what happens to us and around us. (Gorki, 2010)

¹²⁶ The introduction, and fractious history, of rock music in Cuba is a subject addressed in depth by Deborah Pacini Hernandez and Reebee Garofalo (2000, 2004), by Humberto Mandulay López (1997), and in my article ‘Porno Para Ricardo: Rock Music and the ‘Obsession with Identity’ in Contemporary Cuba’ (Astley, forthcoming). These articles all suggest that many of the early generation of rockers in Cuba were persecuted by the state simply for adopting cultural symbols associated with rock music.

I think that singing in Spanish about issues surrounding you makes you a part of that environment. You can call it ‘Cubanness’, you can call it a Cuban environment, or anything you like. I think creative people create from their experience. Individual experience comes from the environment the person is raised in. The environment that surrounds us is this one, so we create and take on elements from this environment. (Ciro, 2010)

Such stances again reflect the desire – indeed the duty - to speak directly to the contemporary socio-cultural surrounding in lyrics as means of constructing an ‘authentic’ identity. The band assert that the way to do this is to write lyrics that address these concerns in a forthright manner, using the language of Cuba – both culturally and linguistically. The band’s own lyrics are rife with such examples of distinctly Cuban cultural and linguistic language, and the attempt to ‘Cubanise’ the lyrics of ‘Don’t Cry’ – to give them a Cuban pronunciation – renders them incomprehensible (the meaningless ‘*Don Crí*’). They make no sense in their new cultural context, and as such, they cannot speak of a Cuban identity.

There is an interesting distinction to be made here between the nonsense singing of ‘*Don Crí*’ and the Russian lyrics of ‘*Los Músicos de Bremen*’. Though these Russian lyrics are clearly not Cuban, though their actual meaning maybe unintelligible (perhaps even to the band themselves, though Ciro’s Russian seems pretty convincing), they are used to make sense of a particular part of Cuban socio-cultural history. Their very unintelligibility is part of the point, referencing the incompatibility, perhaps, between Soviet and Cuban cultures. However, in ‘*Don Crí*’, the words as sung by Ciro’s impersonated *friki* are not just incomprehensible, but non-comprehensible; they do not make sense *at all*. They offer, again citing Gorki’s complaint at the rock scene, “no communication”, particularly in expressing some aspect of Cuban identity. As Roland Barthes notes of the significance of text accompanying an image, “at the level of the literal message, the text replies – in a more or less direct, more or less partial manner – to the question: *what is it?*” (1977:39). Again substituting terminology, it may be useful to suggest that at the level of the literal message the *lyrics* reply – in a more or less direct manner – to the question: what is the song *about*? Such a suggestion coincides with Dave Laing’s assertion that “typically in popular music recording what is foregrounded is the voice” (1985:54), and that the reason for such foregrounding is the “opportunity of identification” (ibid.) with what the words are saying; what the signer is singing about¹²⁷. In the smudged repetition of the original lyrical message, this literal message – what the song is about – is erased, and deliberately so. In its place, albeit less literally voiced, is the message that such lyrics, in their copied state cannot

¹²⁷ Laing’s work on the importance of the foregrounded voice, and potential effects of its “disappearance” into the “background” will be discussed in greater depth in the final chapter of this work on noises.

offer a communication to, or crucially *about*, a contemporary Cuban identity. In the desire to copy the literal message verbatim, it has been reproduced incomprehensibly.

The above does not suggest that Porno Para Ricardo dismiss absolutely the use of modes of rock discourse to define a Cuban identity. Indeed, they themselves cite references from British and American punk readily. Their consternation lies with the ‘carrying’, to refer once more to Shepherd’s phrase, of predetermined meaning in rock music to be used to define an identity; one setting itself precisely in *opposition* to the notion of ‘traditional’ constructions of Cubanness, rather than as a commentary upon and attempt to better cohabit and synthesise with it. For such a use of foreign rock music not only falls into the same trap of presenting rigidly defined spaces of identity that one must adhere to without recontextualisation, but it also serves to leave this established space of ‘traditional’ Cuban identity, and the identity of those who are afforded the ‘authenticity’ to claim it as theirs, uncontested. The adoption and utilisation exclusively of U.S. rock music, for Porno Para Ricardo, further serves to confirm the revolutionary schisms and binaries that disallow many Cubans from entering into the space of Cubanness. By adopting foreign music exclusively to identify themselves, the *friki* subculture places *itself* outside of Cuban identity; they rescind their own ownership over Cuba’s cultural history.

Porno Para Ricardo’s work operates within and around both these rigid spaces of rock music and Cuban tradition. It seeks to break some of the binaristic discourse that pits these two always already authentic and always already defined spaces of identity against one another, and demonstrate that one may construct one’s own identity from fragments of both spaces; that one may be both Cuban *and* rock, or that one may find aspects of oneself in both traditional and rock musics. Such an identity construction brings to mind Andy Bennett’s assertion that:

Music... plays a significant part in the way that individuals author space, musical texts being creatively combined with local knowledge and sensibilities in ways that tell particular stories about the local, and impose collectively defined meanings and significances on space. At the same time, however, it is important to note that such authorings of space produce not one, but a series of competing local narratives (Bennett, 2000, in Whiteley et al. 2004:3)

In the final example, I demonstrate one way in which Porno Para Ricardo stake a claim to Cuban traditional music as a constituent part of their more adaptable and multifaceted space of Cuban identity.

“Mucho Corazón”: Becoming Custodians of Cubanness

If the parodic cover discussed above presents for the band something of an ‘identity in relief’, a series of negatives against which the band are defined, then the following example of covering quite shockingly does the opposite. As with so much of Porno Para Ricardo’s oeuvre, complication is never far away, and the opening track on *‘El Disco Rojo Desteñido’*, a ‘straight’ cover version of a bolero standard *‘Mucho Corazón’* (‘A Lot of Heart’), would appear to present itself as a faithful rendition of a Cuban classic. Through ‘covering’ not only the *song*, but by playing with the notion of covering an identity – that of the ‘authentic Cuban musician’ – Porno Para Ricardo assert the significance of this more established sound of Cubanness to them as Cubans. In attempting to redefine their perception of Cuban identity, they do not need to shun these more traditional soundscapes, rather, they must be augmented, recontextualised, and renovated, perhaps even ‘translated’ in much the same way as imported rock music genres.

This sincere bolero, within a more antagonistic rock context, asserts that even those vehemently ‘outside the Revolution’ – those that the state might define as ‘non-Cuban’ in some sense - may find a significant part of themselves within such musics. Indeed, Porno Para Ricardo make themselves custodians of this traditional music – this image of Cuban identity – and by so doing, seek to blur the divisions between yet more of the seemingly nontransversible dichotomies of Cubanness. As Gorki himself notes, wrestling with these two musical identities is both confusing, and yet necessary to define *his* Cubanness:

I love bolero and Cuban music in general just as much as I like rock and roll – well I like rock and roll a bit more, but I like Cuban music just as much... In fact, in the latest album, we’ve recorded a bolero. We start the album with a bolero, to give people what they’re not expecting... Of course this is a bolero that somehow sets up the band’s position... contextualising that bolero within a rock album, and even more so with the characteristics of our band, has a special meaning (Gorki, 2010).

This *bolero* voice is far from the ironic mask of *‘Don Cr?’*. It is sincere and faithful and, in terms of its iteration of performative and musical cues, appears to demonstrate an affinity to the source material. The band’s ability to recreate the musical codes associated not only with the individual song, but with the genre as a whole stands in stark contrast to both their wilful reinterpretation in *‘Músicos de Bremen’* and their blurry lyrical incomprehensibility in *‘Don Cr?’*.

Their rendition of *‘Mucho Corazón’* makes little interpretive change to the soundworld. It ‘sounds traditional’, and this traditional sound is being made to speak to (and for) a facet of the band’s collective identity. Two acoustic guitars, perfectly tuned, intertwine and

complement each other, paying close attention to the implied bolero rhythm, strengthened and reasserted as the track continues by the emergence of that most ubiquitous of Cuban markers, the *clave*¹²⁸. There is a slight fluidity, a tentative uncertainty in the rhythm; a struggle and deep concentration with the material, a desire to recreate, to construct something with precision. Porno Para Ricardo's usual soundworld is completely absent, as the band are made to inhabit a soundscape at once strikingly familiar (within the context of Cuban music) and yet surprisingly alien (within the anticipated soundscape of a punk album). Most surprising of all is Gorki's voice. Usually strained, gravelly in its acerbity, and wilfully distorted and imprecise, here it is presented as that of an alarmingly good '*bolerista*'. The powerfully rich mid-range tenor, the measured tremolo accents at the end of each line, the never-ostentatious-but-patently-'felt' emotional connection to the words being sung.

It is precisely this fidelity to the original that provides the shock, as the punk deconstruction of 'the original' one expects never arrives. The tension created by this interpolating *bolero* voice is never ruptured¹²⁹ by the return of the punk sneer. The 'noisy' reterritorialisation of the space of "stereotypical Cubanness" (Mario Masvidal, 2007) one expects never takes place. The bolero remains faithfully rendered. It is, as Gorki intended it to be, something unexpected at the beginning of a rock album.

But that it is unexpected, or considered as a 'cover version' at all, relies on the established identity of the band surrounding the bolero. The intertextual framework within which this performance of a marker of traditional conceptions of Cuban music is made to sit is, at first glance, shocking and incongruous. The relationship this punk band, otherwise so critical of symbols of Cuban nationalism, have towards this source material is unclear. In his work on cover versions, Dai Griffiths discusses the 'distance' between original and cover, suggesting the inclusion of "the terms 'rendition' and 'transformation', rendition being a straightforwardly faithful version of the original... [and] transformation being a more determined claim on the original" (2002:52). However, Porno Para Ricardo's bolero cover sits somewhat uncomfortably between these two distances. Musically speaking it is a faithful rendition of the bolero soundworld (or as faithful as four rock musicians without professional musical training can get), but the context – the surrounding tracks, the artwork and prior knowledge and expectations the listener may have of Porno Para Ricardo – puts

¹²⁸ The *clave* rhythm is often described as the 'heartbeat' of Cuban music, and is an integral part of many of Cuba's genres: *son*, *rumba*, *salsa*. It is typically played on the *clave* – two wooden sticks with a high pitch tone.

¹²⁹ Perhaps more accurately speaking, this tension is not ruptured *within the song itself*. Of course as track two, the familiarly irreverent 'La Agencia del Rock' (discussed in Chapter Three), begins the tension is broken, and the 'real' sound of the band is heard. But this prolonged surprise stands in contrast to the more familiar style of punk cover version, as typified by the band's version of '*Los Músicos de Bremen*' where a 'quiet' beginning is rapidly punctured by a punk rendering of the original.

a significant distance between the established identity of the musician associated with the original and its new custodians.

Usually within Cuban discourse, the performance of such a ‘standard’ from such a ‘standard’ genre (at least as performed by a group adhering to the other modes of Cuban identity associated with the music) would not be considered as covering. In the myriad renditions of evergreen boleros that constitute so visible a part of Cuba’s contemporary music scene, the processes of performing the work of another musician as a tool to enter into a dialogue between the present and a particular part of the past may be the same as one might find in an act of ‘covering’. Similarly, the replication of tradition – which goes further than musical reproduction, to include fashion, dance and musicians’ appearance – may be equally concerned with authenticity work, commenting upon the continued authenticity of the original and demonstrating the authenticity of the new performer. However, though the work of individual musicians is iterated, and styles and performative codes created and defined by individual musicians are invoked, the term ‘cover version’ would not accurately describe the work of many of these Cuban musicians playing (indeed repeating) the strongly engrained codes and meanings attached to the island’s ‘traditional genres’. Rather, these performances represent an attempt stake a claim of ‘ownership’ over a body of ‘authentically Cuban’ musical material, to assume the custodianship over a pertinent symbol of traditional Cuban identity, and to tend to one aspect of the “garden culture” (Gellner, 1983:7) of Cubanness, cultivating its relevance in describing a contemporary Cubanness.

Thus, in a sense, the individuality of the originators of Cuba’s genres becomes subjugated in the creation of a ‘national’ style, or at least subsumed into a quasi-folkloric pantheon of tradition. The idiosyncrasies of Benny Moré’s singing style, dress and dance, for example, become not individual affectations to imitate (or cover), but signs of an authentic Cuban identity to act as custodian over¹³⁰. Traditional Cuban musicians perform a style, and thus reemphasize the continued legacy of a Cuban identity, in their reproductions of Cuban standards. Access to assume the right to perform that identity authentically relies on the authenticity of the performer to conform to a standard. One must demonstrate (through performance of the material) that one is an ‘authentic Cuban musician’; a custodian of national identity. One key ingredient that defines this authenticity, and indeed is integral to

¹³⁰ Benny Moré was a charismatic and celebrated big band leader from Cuba, working in the commercial heyday of Cuban music pre-Revolution. I have seen numerous musicians (even street performers) dressed as, dancing as, and singing as Benny Moré throughout Havana. These examples form just the more touristic side of the appropriation of individual traits into a ‘traditional’ collective that is perhaps indicative of certain Cuban musics.

much of Cuban music, is a kind of professionalism and musical (and particularly *rhythmic*) competence¹³¹.

The professionalisation of popular music has given generations of musicians a deep understanding and knowledge of traditional music. For those ‘within’ this system, there is a vast wealth of musical material available to define one’s musical identity. This has, in some senses, created an associated reverence to ‘the greats’ and a canon of self-evidently ‘authentically Cuban’ songs and genres to which one must almost become ‘custodian’ in order to assert an authentic Cubanness to one’s practice. Robin Moore writes of both the importance, and the potential problems, of placing such a high value on Cuban traditional music:

[T]he “rescue of cultural roots” has been a fundamental component of Cuban cultural policy since 1959 (Hart Dávalos, 1988:23). Prevailing views contend, with some justification, that prior governments did little to support traditional music and that a barrage of products from abroad threatened to compromise, even destroy, much Cuban heritage. The danger of nationalist policies, as in the case of those related to class based art, is that taken to extremes they can result in oppressive prohibitions (Moore, 2006:12-3).

The iteration of these ingrained sounds of authentic Cuban music, and the associations to a national identity to which they allude, are reinforced as the conception of what constitutes a Cuban musician is solidified.

Antoni Kapcia provides an insight into the dual role of innovator and custodian of tradition that many of Cuba’s ‘traditional’ musicians perform, noting that the centrality of (certain) ‘traditional’ musics as emblems of Cuban identity and the strive for professionalisation associated with the Revolution has led to a body of professional, classically-educated popular musicians with a thorough knowledge of traditional genres:

The post-1959 drive for professionalism and education meant that recognised performers, artists and musicians were expected to have graduated from the ISA or other specialist schools, today’s emphasis on traditional music... has created a generation aware of those traditions and willing to develop idiosyncratic and improvised versions of them (2005:198).

Certainly the professionalism of musicians, the high level of institutional training, rhythmic and technical proficiency and a knowledge of ‘the classics’¹³², has permeated even the most populist of genres.

¹³¹ Again, Raul A. Fernández discusses the centrality of rhythm, and the confusion it can bring to other musicians, when discussing Cuban music (1993).

¹³² Though a differing pantheon from European or American conservatoires, Cuban music schools do place significant emphasis on Western Classical music, alongside traditional Cuban genres.

However, when it is Porno Para Ricardo offering the rendition, a band not only removed from revolutionary rhetoric, but also, as discussed above, effectively prohibited from being Cuban musicians, the tacit construction of Cuban identity is brought to the fore. Assumed traits of Cuban musicianship, aspects of autochthonous Cuban expression, are suddenly made shocking, and overt. The performance becomes something of a ‘transformative cover version’, in Griffiths’ terms, not just of the song, but of this constructed notion of Cuban identity; a critique of the narrow aesthetic parameters of the identity of the musicians ‘able’ to perform this material. Porno Para Ricardo are, in a sense, presenting a parodic cover version of this paradigm of ‘authentic Cubanness’, covering the role of the ‘authentic’ Cuban musician, and in doing so are problematising that construction, and seeking to claim a space within the definition of what constitutes a ‘Cuban’ musician for themselves. The identity of the *bolerista* – the identity of *bolero*, and thus, vicariously, the identity of Cuban culture – is problematised by the faithful rendition performed by such an incongruous source. We are left to question who has the right to stake a claim to the term ‘Cuban musician’.

Certainly there is a social commentary in the song selection. It is a bolero that “sets up the band’s position” (Gorki, 2010) and gives a personal nuance to the opening line:

Dicen que no es vida, esta que yo vivo

They say it is not life that I live

The more abstract ‘they’ of the original is converted into a much more pointedly politicised ‘they’ in Porno Para Ricardo’s experience of existing within (or outside) a socio-political system that seeks to deny them any platform for disseminating their music, and also outside a rock subculture that values musical professionalism, often at the cost, in Porno Para Ricardo’s view, of political relevance. The ‘life’ being denied is their identity as Cuban and as musicians. The recontextualised meanings that the band give to this bolero, converting it from a lament of individual lost love to a social commentary on inclusion and exclusion from the Revolution, demonstrates the malleability of meanings in the cover song.

There is a sense in which the meaning of the song is being subverted, reclaimed and recontextualised by the band to assert something anti-hegemonic. The message is that even though they exist ‘outside the Revolution’, Porno Para Ricardo do not necessarily have to rescind their identification with traditional Cuban musical modes. By placing bolero alongside punk in their multifaceted soundworld, Porno Para Ricardo are asserting that

both these musics constitute fragments of their personal identities, and that they can both be included in a composite and contemporary Cuban identity; that a Cuban may find aspects of themselves in both soundworlds; that the two are not mutually exclusive spaces of identity that define the individual totally. This adoption (and adaption) of bolero doesn't attempt to sneer more established conceptions of Cuban identity into obsolescence, to place rock music as *the* authentic representation of Cubanness. Rather it attempts, in Solis' words, to forge "denser and denser networks" (2010:300) between musics, cultures, and aspects of contemporary Cuban life, society and identity.

This faithful bolero cover, set in a rock surrounding, perhaps serves to draw a denser network of connections between musical styles, all of which speak to some aspect of a contemporary Cuban experience to create a more robust definition of Cuban identity, a process that Porno Para Ricardo continually engage in. For example, their most recent album '*Maleconazo Ahora*' opens, equally shockingly, with an original song in a reggaetón style, replete with guest rappers and autotune vocals. Rather than pitting two oppositional and mutually exclusive binaries against one another – the 'rock vs. tradition', 'Cuban vs. foreign', 'authentic vs. inauthentic' models so familiar in much discourse on Cuba, and particularly its music – the band melds the two together and recognises that one may find elements of oneself in different places and texts.

In their adoption of bolero, Porno Para Ricardo are claiming ownership of Cuba's celebrated catalogue of music, presenting themselves as custodians and thus as authentic Cuban musicians. By faithfully recreating bolero, the band are staking a claim to add themselves into the space of who is deemed able to adopt bolero as a signifier of their individual identity construction. They claim the space of bolero (seen as a synecdoche for Cubanness by many) not as sacrosanct, holistic and 'finished', but as partial, malleable and available.

Chapter Five: Laughter

“¿Como no me voy a reír de la Asociación Hermanos Saíz?”

* * *

“This song is called ‘do you know how to fuck a communist?’”. Gorki waits for the translator, laughing at the delayed reaction of the crowd; a hearty cheer goes up. “Well, I don’t need to tell you. The Czechs are experts in fucking communists!” Another delay. An even louder cheer.

Introduction: Laughter as Cuban

From the grotesque caricatures of ‘the Yankees’ that adorn countless political billboards, to the often self-deprecating social commentary of the ubiquitous realm of ‘Pepito’ jokes¹³³, in Cuba, laughter is defiance. Defiance against the external enemy, defiance against the hardships of the everyday and, increasingly, defiance against the Revolution and its power structure, as Yoani Sanchez asserts:

Laughter, banter, kidding around have been group therapy on this island where the frustration and dissatisfaction is exorcised by humor. We laugh at ourselves, and that's healthy, but we also make those who govern us the butts of our jokes, though generally in the privacy of the family or with a close circle of friends.

We assign nicknames, look for burlesque similarities between one public figure and another, collect jokes and burst out laughing in a gesture that is sometimes more sad than happy. In short, what makes us roar with laughter would make us cry, if we couldn't find a way to joke about it (Sanchez, 2010).

Yet as many theorists working in this field have noted, laughter, as “one of our species’ most prominent and perhaps functionally significant vocalizations” (Robert Provine 1993:298), is a complex and multifaceted communication device, capable of housing, and revealing, a multitude of meanings about the person laughing and the surrounding environment. Laughter, as H.C. McComas notes, is much more than a signal of something ‘funny’.

Certainly the pleasures which grow out of the sensations, activities and instincts cannot account for all forms of laughter. They have no part in the laughter of derision, for example, or the laughter of embarrassment. Such laughter is an artifice. It is allied to language. It is not a natural outcome of a pleasurable experience. It is rather a means of conveying an idea, a form of statement (H.C. McComas, 1923:50).

¹³³ The influential and controversial blogger Yoani Sanchez has written about the significance of these ‘Pepito jokes’, which star the eponymous schoolboy often (deliberately) confusing scenarios or terms associated with the Revolution, or figures of power, and their role as indicator of a Cuban identity: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/yoani-sanchez/meet-pepito-the-character_b_788617.html.

Within the Revolution, laughter has often been utilised as a symbol of resistance against the impositions of the United States and their policies. The ability (the necessity) to laugh in the face of the enemy exemplifies what Rafael Hernández and Haroldo Dilla perceive as one of the key elements that “constitute[s] a world view characteristic of Cuban culture from its inception”. They see “rebellion against both internal and external repression, underlying rejection of a colonial domination and a united front against external enemies as radical features of cultural expression” (1992:31-2), and thus integral to this sense of an holistic Cuban identity. This trope of laughter at the (external, and much more powerful) enemy is further expressed in many examples of Cuban culture. The proto-revolutionary Mambí, and archetypal Cuban, cartoon character Elpidio Valdéz is perpetually laughing at the incompetence and idiocy of the colonial Spanish forces. Musical examples are provided by the revolutionary singer-songwriter Carlos Puebla, whose songs from the early sixties onwards provided a soundtrack, and commentary on, the Revolution’s successes. In songs such as *‘La OEA me causa risa’* (‘The OAS [Organisation of American States] Makes Me Laugh’) and *‘Mira yankee, como nos reímos’* (‘Look Yankee, How We Laugh’), Puebla and his musical associates bond and unify through raucous (though musically measured) laughter, aimed squarely at hegemonic, and yet grotesque, external ‘enemies’. These bouts of solidarious laughter become messages that hardship and ostracisation from global politics and economics are easily dismissed as either of little concern (literally a laughing matter) or soothed by some unshakable internal resolution. The ability to laugh in the face of the Goliath becomes part of a unified national character; a revolutionary Cubanness.

Yet laughter, as expressed again by Yoani Sanchez, is also used by many Cubans not only as a tool for “distancing from distressing events” (Krokoff, 1991, Martin and Lefcourt, 1983, in Keltner and Bonanno, 1997:688), but also as a way of understanding the often incongruous situations of everyday Cuban life:

Laughter is still an effective cure for the daily trials. Thus, on this Island, we bend our lips into a smile more for self-therapy than for happiness... Splitting our sides laughing can also be preventative medicine to avoid disappointments to come. Perhaps for this reason, every time I ask someone about the possible reforms likely to grow out of the Sixth Communist Party Congress, they answer me with a giggle, an ironic “teeheehee.” Next they shrug their shoulders and come out with a phrase such as, “well, no one should have any illusions... maybe they’ll authorize the purchase of houses and cars.” They end their words with another enigmatic grimace of pleasure, confusing me still more. It’s difficult to know if the majority of my compatriots today would prefer that transformation be approved at the Party Congress, or for it to be a fiasco to demonstrate the system’s inability to reform itself (Sanchez, 2011).

Benigno Aguirre similarly writes that “humor is used in Cuban culture to express political scepticism and complaints” (2002:71). However, to this potentially problematic political critique, Aguirre adds the caveat that jokes are made within the private space and are almost always anonymised through collectivity:

Humor is a genre for the anonymous expression of political dissent... as a cultural object, the *chiste* [joke] has an anonymous origin... It can be enacted in ephemeral, short-lived small-group interaction involving a narrator and an audience. The narrator initiates a *chiste* and decides who to share it with (ibid.).

So laughter, in a contemporary Cuban setting, may share some of the defiance and political critique of its revolutionary forebear, however, it is also often confined to the private space, the sound of the home and close circles of friends. This laughter is more guarded, more aware of its consequences; that there are some who might not find the *chiste* amusing.

As one might expect, there is little that is hidden, little that is coy and private, in Porno Para Ricardo’s laughter. Their peals ring out of their albums unguarded, and make for an insistent visitor upon their soundscape. Yet not all their laughter is the same. Not all this laughter is defiant. Occasionally it is heard deliberately interrupting the musical; punctuating and snide, rasping and derisory, a continuation, perhaps, of this defiant laughter paradigm ostensibly so indicative of Cuban identity. Yet as often, the laughter appears ‘naturally’; a chuckle accidentally caught (though deliberately allowed to remain) at the end of a song, the ‘in-joke’ laughter accompanying the between-song skits. This is a ‘different type’ of laughter; one that is not necessarily aimed ‘outward’ at a ridiculed enemy, but ‘inward’ at a reinforced friendship group. When examining these instances of members of the band laughing on record, it is apparent that however accidental the incorporation of laughter sounds, it is always a deliberate addition to, and a significant part of, their constructed soundworld, and thus can be said to be reflecting aspects of the band’s identity. As such, laughter is being utilised to convey a message about the band, their identity, and their reinterpretation of Cubanness, to the listener. Laughter becomes means of non-verbal communication to reassert the band’s identity, and to establish modes of communication and ties of affiliation between them and their wider audience. However, these disparate examples of laughter, as well as sounding very different to one another, seem to be attempting this communication in very different ways.

Both these ‘types’ of laughter – the derisory and the quotidian - in a sense, offer two polar opposites with the same ultimate intention: to define an identity space. Where the former seeks to exclude, to define and ridicule an ‘Other’ against which to claim an opposition, the latter seeks to include those who ‘get the joke’, and to create a non-verbal means of

communication and shared identity. Porno Para Ricardo use these types of laughter essentially as gateways into (or as gateways blocking access to) their defined identity space. Each becomes points of personal identification. Either one shares in the ridicule of the other in derisory laughter, or one becomes part of the subject of ridicule. Either one understands the humour of the in-joke and can laugh along, or one is left confused.

Laughter as Inclusionary and Exclusionary Modes of Identity Construction

The use of laughter *within* musical texts¹³⁴ is a surprisingly broad church. Not only is there a wealth of examples, but they seem to offer a diversity of laughter types from the cynical, to the musical; from the ‘natural’, to the forced. Laughter, it seems, can become as complex and cacophonous a signifier in music as it is in the everyday. What is clear is that laughter as part of the soundworld of a song is far from constituting a single ‘meaning’. Deciphering the sound of laughter can be problematic enough within its ‘natural’ realm of conversation, as Dacher Keltner and George Bonanno write:

A wide array of often contradictory functions has been attributed to laughter, including the punctuation of conversation (Provine, 1993) [and] the communication of aggression and superiority (e.g. Van Hooff, 1972)... Such diversity in description inevitably leads to theoretical debate about the nature of laughter, for example, whether laughter is necessarily associated with the experience of positive emotion (Keltner and Bonanno, 1997:699).

So to incorporate it within a soundscape recorded and quantified, where every sound, one can assume, is given over to imparting some meaning to the listener (or can be interpreted as such by the listener) provides yet more complication and confusion.

To resolve this quandary, I refer to a most prescient assertion made by Charles Baudelaire in his essay ‘On the Essence of Laughter’; “there are *different varieties of laughter*.” (Baudelaire, 1995 [1855]:155, emphasis original). This assertion of different types of laughter is one which, according to Matthew Gervais and David Sloan Wilson (2005), many researchers into the subject have failed to recognise. They suggest a distinction needs to be drawn between two broad *types* of laughter: Duchenne and non-Duchenne laughter (2005:396).

The distinction derives from the work of French neurologist Duchenne de Boulogne (1862), who classified a Duchenne smile as one which “involve orbicularis oculi muscle action”, but, more significantly for this thesis, as being “associated with pleasant stimuli and feelings” (in Keltner and Bonanno, 1997:690). This distinction has been applied to laughter by Gervais and Wilson, and Keltner and Bonanno, among others, to define

¹³⁴ In this chapter, I am concentrating exclusively upon songs where laughter forms a part of the soundworld of the song, rather than on ‘comedy songs’ designed to provoke laughter in the listener.

“Duchenne laughter [as] stimulus-driven and emotionally valenced”, whereas “non-Duchenne laughter is unconnected (except perhaps via facial feedback) to emotional experience” (Gervais and Wilson, 2005:403). This does not necessarily translate into a ‘fake’/ ‘genuine’ dichotomy, and many theorists are keen to point out that non-Duchenne laughter can be a subconscious way to trivialise stress (Panksepp, 2000), ease social interaction (Provine, 1996) or as “dissociation” (Keltner and Bonanno, 1997). But we can perhaps take as a starting point the division between ‘performed’ and ‘spontaneous’ laughs as a way of dividing and defining the different examples of laughter as it appears on musical recordings; correlating the former with the above definition of Duchenne laughter, and the latter with non-Duchenne laughter. Of course, as with any binary, there will be grey areas between these two extremes, and both are problematised by the deliberate decision to include laughter, whether performed or spontaneous, *ex post facto* within the recording¹³⁵. However, as a tool for analysing the instances of laughter in Porno Para Ricardo’s work, this model is apposite.

Though it may be useful to differentiate between these two types of laughter – the performed non-Duchenne and the spontaneous Duchenne – it is also useful to view them in tandem as modes of identity construction. Both these types of laughter appear in Porno Para Ricardo’s work, and both appear to be utilised to help construct and disseminate to the audience the band’s identity. Though very different in outlook, intent and emotional significance, both these broad types of laughter help to communicate the identity of the person laughing. It informs us of what is funny, whether that be a positive or negative epithet, to the person laughing. Not only this, but laughter offers the opportunity for reciprocation, to laugh along (or laugh at) and thus share in part of the identity being created. Both these laughter types are prevalent in the band’s soundworld, and both help manage an identity space. But, in a sense, they manage that space in different ways. In the case of the Duchenne laughter, identity is defined by what lies within it. In the case of non-Duchenne laughter, identity is defined by what lies outside. As Robert Provine asserts:

Laughter is a harlequin that shows two faces – one smiling and friendly, the other dark and ominous... Laughter can serve as a bond to bring people together or as a weapon to humiliate and ostracise its victims (2000:2).

Provine’s harlequin speaks of both inclusive and an exclusive types of laughter, and in the examples below of Porno Para Ricardo’s work, these two map quite neatly onto the notion of a Duchenne – a spontaneous and natural – and non-Duchenne – a performed and non-

¹³⁵ That is to say, even if an instance of spontaneous laughter is recorded, the decision to allow it to remain within the recording almost imbues it with a retroactive deliberateness.

humorous - laughter. A laughter aimed at ridiculing and deauthenticating a target could be said to define a space of identity from without; to *exclude* from the identity space those who either belong to ridiculed target group, or feel some affiliation to it. This type of laughter defines what the identity is *not*; what it is opposed to. On the other hand, a laughter that has no overt 'target', but is seen as erupting naturally from a shared perception of a social situation would tend to serve as an *inclusive* form of laughter, creating a moment of solidarity. This type of laughter defines, in part, what the identity *is*. Gervais and Wilson make a similar assertion regarding this inclusive/exclusive ability of laughter:

Laughter can promote the integration of new individuals into an already-present group structure (Gamble, 2001), but can also play a role in delineating in-group and out-group boundaries (laughter's "dark side"; Panksepp, 2000) by establishing 'exclusionary group identities' and by being directly aggressive towards members of the out-group (Gervais and Wilson, 2005:403).

This division of laughter types and identity spaces into a neatly dichotomised 'inside' and 'outside' may seem a little problematic, particularly when placed in the context of Fidel Castro's similar-sounding 'within' and 'outside' the Revolution maxim a returning motif herein, and with this thesis arguing that so much of Porno Para Ricardo's work seeks to meld or dismantle these politicised dichotomies that define so much of Cuban discourse. However, rather than being competing, mutually exclusive stances, I propose that the two types of laughter reinforce and build upon each other in cementing and defining the parameters of Porno Para Ricardo's identity (and, vicariously, the identities of those who identify with them). These two laughters – the inclusionary and exclusionary - work in tandem to define their identity space and them both help disseminate that identity to their audience. The assertion of a vehement opposition to the AHS and various other musical institutions is played out alongside a quotidian demonstration of a more positive group mentality. Both these instances of laughter work alongside one another to better define the identity of the band. Both exclude those against whom the joke is made, but crucially, both include those with the ability to laugh along.

This dual laughter does more than just shift the target of defiant ridicule away from an external enemy and onto the internal government, and thus is more than just a reincarnation of Puebla's revolutionary-defiant 'Cuban' laughter (though, as will be seen in the example below, this is certainly an integral part of Porno Para Ricardo's laughter). Their laughter is aimed at the self, too. Porno Para Ricardo don't present themselves as the plucky David to the hegemonic Goliath, rather their two types of laughter, somewhat paradoxically, are used to place themselves outside of these sort of binaristic groupings. Though their laughter is communicating an identity, and though the subjects of laughter –

both positive and negative – are distinctly Cuban, their laughter is far from a continuation of this trope of defiant Cuban identity.

'Peste a Ratas': Non-Duchenne Laughter

'Peste a Ratas' ('Stench of Rats') is track six on the band's second album '*A mí no me gusta...*'. This album followed, and responded vehemently to, Gorki's incarceration and the band's removal from the *Asociación Hermanos Saíz* roster. As noted in the introduction, the diptych albums of 2006 represent a significant sea change in the band's mentality, and demonstrate a much more assertive, much more politically motivated stance, particularly lyrically. This rather vitriolic song is one particularly striking example of this change in lyrical tone¹³⁶. 'Peste a Ratas' takes a very direct line in criticising institutions such as the AHS, but also naming particular revolutionary luminaries. These songs portray these named individuals as laughing stock; ridiculous, grotesque characters to whom Porno Para Ricardo are standing defiant. 'Peste a Ratas' doesn't name anybody in particular, but rather highlights the faceless bureaucracy of the institution; the impenetrable rigidity that has left Porno Para Ricardo as distinct 'outsiders'. However, unlike other songs on this album designed to be humorous, this song is almost aggressive. Gorki performs as something of a lunatic, stalking the track with manic outbursts. This song is more threatening than comedic, and yet it contains laughter throughout.

The first instance of laughter comes at the end of the introduction, as a portentous cackle from Gorki. It is at once threatening and manic, and certainly defiant. It gives the sense that Gorki is fully aware of the onslaught of dissident and dangerous slander that is about to come. He seems unable to stop it, and is almost daring the listener to continue, warning them, acting as a presage. This flash of deliberately forced laughter provides a good example of this type of 'performed' laughter which I am equating with the term 'non-Duchenne'. It is not 'natural', nor a spontaneous reaction to a present stimulus, and could not be said to be comedic, or linked to positive emotion. Indeed it sounds almost pained; a deliberate, and tellingly humourless, affectation. It is because of this that it sounds challenging. Unlike Duchenne laughter, which can often provoke laughter in the listener without the necessity of finding the initial stimulus funny (the notion of 'infectious' laughter), in this case, the laughter provokes a feeling of unease, even a concern for the character laughing. The listener is forced to find the laughter threatening, a sign of derangement and instability, emotional states both alluded to in the lyrics and delivery of

¹³⁶ Other examples from these albums would include '*Comunista Chivatón*', as discussed in Chapter Three, or the band's most infamous song '*El Comandante*'.

this song. As with the following aggressively dissident lyrics, there is a feeling of danger, of incomprehension that someone would utter such things out loud, fully aware of the consequences. However, this laughter, whilst warding off those ‘within the Revolution’, making them feel threatened, to those perhaps already outside, to those a different perception of state infrastructure, perhaps the laughter comes across as the only sane response to the insanity of the situation depicted in the song (as discussed below). In this case, the laughter is not a threat, because the laughter is not aimed at finding the subject being laughed funny, but risible. If one does find the AHS risible, then through this forced, non-Duchenne laugh, one is afforded entry into a space of an “exclusionary group identity” (Gervais and Wilson, 2005:403).

This rasping cackle begins the process of forging a space of identity within the song; a space into which Gorki is daring the listener to enter, mocking, perhaps, the fear with which many would greet such a subject matter. If this laughter can be seen as a ‘doorway’ of sorts into the identity space behind, then it is a doorway deliberately barred to many. Again, it is worth noting Gorki’s repeated consternation with the fear of many Cuban musicians – particularly *frikis* – in addressing the repression of the Revolution. From his claim that Porno Para Ricardo are “saying what others are too scared to say” (Cuba Rebelión, 2008), to his anger at the over-reliance of many musicians on state infrastructure to legitimise one’s career (cf. Gorki, 2010 and MLC, 2008), the issue of not criticising overtly – “by name and surname” (Placák, 2006) – the very members of this bureaucratic hegemony is a constant motif in Porno Para Ricardo’s work. So this harbinger of dissidence, this cruel laughter, is not only aimed at the very “rats in the system”, but against those who will not (dare to) laugh along. This opening laughter acts as a gatekeeper to a ‘dissident’ and forbidden space; a barrier which excludes and repels those who do not share in it (and vicariously converts those who turn away into the subject being ridiculed, into rats themselves).

However, Gorki’s non-Duchenne laughter in this song is far from all bravado and bluster, style and defiance. Though much less prominent, a different kind of laughter, much less studied, yet just as humourless, follows at 0.33. It comes as almost a stumble on the first word of the second line: ‘*esto*’, and continues to run, albeit unvoiced, throughout the rest of this verse; in the nasal affectation (a knowing nod to the punk voice of Johnny Rotten) completing this second line “...*tienen su dinero sin hacer nada*”¹³⁷ (“they get money without doing anything”), and in the slightly hurried delivery of the following line “*Se la pasan todo el*

¹³⁷ See appendix for full lyrics.

día repitiendo el discurso de papá cucaracha” (“they spend all day repeating daddy cockroach’s speeches”) and in the flourish on the phrase *‘papa cucaracha’*, another thinly veiled, and less-than-flattering, epithet for the nation’s (then) president. This underlying laughter is present throughout this verse, and is threatening in a different way. Unlike the previous, fully voiced cackle which threatens the listener, this unstable laughter threatens to derail the song itself. It threatens to disintegrate the structure, make the message of the lyrics unintelligible behind a wall of convulsive laughter. Listening to any Porno Para Ricardo song, this threat of disintegration into chaotic noise (discussed in the following chapter) is often present, and indeed is manifest in a number of songs (this one included). Such laughter would tend to contradict the opening quote from McComas suggesting laughter is “a means of conveying an idea, a form of statement” (1923:50). Laughter here is threatening to mask the conveyance of an idea, to render it indecipherable.

This potential for destruction adds to the frisson of danger in the message. Perhaps Gorki is laughing at the sheer brazenness of his overtly ‘dissident’ message being recorded, conveyed so openly and unashamedly. Yoani Sanchez’s take on this type of target-driven (and probably non-Duchenne) laughter within a Cuban context is important to repeat here: “we also make those who govern us the butts of our jokes, though generally in the privacy of the family or with a close circle of friends” (Sanchez, 2010). This sort of laughter, though a prevalent part of many Cuban identities, seldom makes its way into the light of the public realm. To ridicule those who govern is a private joke. Perhaps Gorki’s stumbling laughter, rippling under the surface of these defiantly irreverent lyrics, threatening to derail them, forms an example of a ‘nervous laughter’; a concern, albeit repressed (perhaps even unconscious), at bringing these often private taunts out into the open, expanding the private familial circle out to unknown ears, putting a definite name on to the teller of otherwise shared and anonymous jokes, with the potential for recrimination that such an act entails. Laughter here is perhaps being used to “signal that anxiety is being experienced” (Gervais and Wilson 2005:400). Perhaps, too, this laughter should be seen as a “defence mechanism that trivialises stressful or psychologically overly demanding circumstances” (Panksepp, 2000, in Gervais and Wilson, 2005:402). Recognising the potential for retribution for voicing these controversial opinions, this vein of laughter potentially belies the defiance of the words, and demonstrates a nervousness in their telling.

Though there may be a slight nervousness in the delivery, this laughter appears to reflect Keltner and Bonanno’s notion of “laughter-as-dissociation” (1997). Far from being a reluctance to give voice to the topics being laughed at (or about), Porno Para Ricardo

convert the fear of recrimination into a recognition of their ability to speak out. Keltner and Bonanno describe the phenomenon thus:

First, laughter involves a shift in psychological state, from negative to positive emotion or from incongruity and violated expectations to understanding and insight. Second, laughter involves a reduction in the distress associated with negative emotions, perceptual incongruity, or violated expectations. Third, the reduction in distress produces a positive feeling state that is labelled humour, amusement, mirth, or exhilaration. Taken together, these observations can be phrased as a laughter-as-dissociation hypothesis (1997:688).

Rather than seeing this laughter as a potential threat to the stability of the song, or as a nervous, stress-ridden affectation, it could be suggested that it stems from a realisation, in the moment, of a shift in perception towards the subject of the song. The bureaucratic and punitive measures visited upon the band by a faceless and timid organisation are converted, as discussed above, from overbearing, omnipotent hegemony, to grotesquely risible rats and cockroaches scrabbling over one another.

The song owes its origins to the bitter resentment towards an agency – the AHS – who have systematically attempted to remove Porno Para Ricardo from the cultural landscape. As this song was written, Porno Para Ricardo had been removed from their list of artists, relegating the band to a non-status, and disallowing them rehearsal spaces and opportunities to perform live (García-Freyre 2008a:556). So within this song, this laughter emerges as negative emotions of persecution are transformed into the positive realisation that the band are continuing regardless, and a shift in perspective from anger to derisory laughter; a recognition that the AHS (and, by extension, the government) are far from being the ubiquitous power they purport to be, and are, in fact, a petty, insecure institution¹³⁸. This realisation leads to the rhetorical question of the chorus, and its companion laughter: “*Como no me voy a reír de la Asociación Hermanos Saíz?*” (“How can I not laugh at the AHS?”).

The rhythmic stabs of the chorus are the most ‘performed’ examples of laughter in the song, designed to fit rhythmically and musically into the refrain, punctuating and enveloping the subject of ridicule:

Como no me voy a reír de la Asociación (ha-ha) Hermanos Saíz (ha-ha)
Como no me voy a reír de la Asociación Hermanos Saíz (ha-ha)

¹³⁸ This charge of insecurity, rather than omnipotence, was recently voiced by Gorki at our meeting in Prague (June, 2011). Recounting yet another instance of police harassment; this time being pulled over whilst attempting to play a last-minute gig at a friend’s house, Gorki concluded that “they must be really insecure if they can’t let four skinny guys play some music at a friend’s house”. The realisation of institutional impotence, rather than omnipotence, is also a feature of the song ‘*Comunista Chivatón*’, as discussed in Chapter Three.

How can I not laugh at the Association (ha ha) *Hermanos Saíz* (ha ha)
How can I not laugh at the Association *Hermanos Saíz* (ha ha)

These staccato bouts of laughter sound not only forced, but breathless (especially the final one), and much less confidently performed than the opening laugh. What might have been the central recurring motif of the song sounds somewhat squeezed in, thrown away almost. Obviously this chorus, in its rhetorical question and rhythmic laughter, pays homage to the Carlos Puebla song '*La OEA me causa risa*'¹³⁹ ('The Organisation of American States (OAS) Makes Me Laugh'). However, Gorki's laughter makes much less of a prominent appearance than does Puebla's. Where Puebla, accompanied by his band mates, makes a point of repeatedly and vociferously laughing at *his* risible institution (from which 'he', as representative of revolutionary Cuba, has been expelled), Gorki laughs alone; casually and in passing. Perhaps the institution at the centre of his derision plays a much less prominent role in his identity? In analysing this bout of laughter, it is tempting again to refer to Keltner and Bonanno's notion of 'laughter-as-dissociation'. It is patently an example of performed, non-Duchenne laughter, which Gorki is using to make light of their anger and harsh treatment at the hands of the AHS, even using it as a way of reconciling and coming to terms with this past, resolving it by putting it into song, making it a 'joke', albeit one laughed at with distinct disdain.

These assertions may have some weight behind them, however *Porno Para Ricardo*, though clearly making the AHS a similarly ridiculed target of laughter, do not appear to be promoting themselves as a 'powerful force' in opposition. Rather, it seems as though there may be something of a paradoxical demonstration of lack of power in both parties. *Porno Para Ricardo*, are (self) portrayed as a sort of low-status agent – outsiders looking in - yet simultaneously, they illustrate the less-than-omnipotent presence of the government who have tried, and failed, to silence the band.

What links *Porno Para Ricardo*'s pastiche to Puebla's original, aside from the musical/rhythmic incorporation of laughter into a song, is what is considered 'funny' about the institution being laughed at. Of particular importance is the notion of laughter at the grotesque; "beings whose authority and *raison d'être* cannot be drawn from the code of common sense" (Baudelaire, 1995:156-7). Puebla's otherwise slightly puerile charge that the OAS is "so ugly that it causes laughter" would tend to follow Baudelaire's image of the

¹³⁹ Puebla's song, written in the mid-1960s deals with Cuba's expulsion from the Organisation of American States, by asking a similarly rhetorical question: '*Como no me voy a reír de la OEA, si es una cosa tan fea; tan fea que causa risa, [jajaja]*' ('how can I not laugh at the OEA, if it is such an ugly thing; so ugly it makes me laugh [hahaha]').

grotesque in portraying an institution that appears to defy common sense. This is what makes it a subject for ridicule, a source of (bitter) amusement for Puebla, and it is a trait which is shared in Porno Para Ricardo's laughter at the AHS. Gorki is vehement in stressing the incomprehensible and unnecessary notion of a "rock agency":¹⁴⁰

The only thing we have in Cuba is a wrongly named "rock movement", which is even directed by a governmental agency called "Rock Agency" that answers to the government. It is a total aberration of what rock is. When did rock ever have to be institutionalised? (MLC interview, 2008).

The verisimilitude of Gorki's claim to Cuba's rock movement being 'wrongly named' aside¹⁴¹, obviously there is a sentiment of bafflement at the existence of the AHS in this laughter, a disdain levelled at both the government for thinking it has the ability to institutionalise rock music, and to the musicians who believe that membership is their only viable option. The AHS is portrayed as grotesque in the Baudelairian sense, apparently seeming to defy common sense, having no discernible *raison d'être*. As quoted throughout this work, Gorki's consternation is that such musicians still find it necessary to adhere to the requests and commands of such an incongruous – such an *ugly* – institution as the AHS. "The saddest thing is that some people believe that they need the state to support their creativity, and are not conscious of the 'Do It Yourself' spirit" (ibid.). Once more, we find Porno Para Ricardo positioned in a space between 'Others': the state and the rock fraternity¹⁴². Once more we find a fragment of the band's identity used to critique the hegemony of the Revolution and its conglomeration of institutions, yet simultaneously critiquing those who do not address such asserted omnipotence.

However, the identity that Gorki's laughter at the grotesque constructs (or communicates) is not one of power, not authenticity-in-relief (that is, as seen in opposition to something self-evidently *inauthentic*), it is one of weakness. Porno Para Ricardo's laughter reveals an identity as perennial outsiders, laughing maniacally at the gates of society, ridiculing those inside, but unable, it would seem, to convince anyone to step outside and join them in the joke. Once more, Baudelaire's theorisations on laughter prove apposite in decoding the significances of Porno Para Ricardo's laughter, as he claims that "laughter is generally the apanage of madmen, and that it always implies more or less ignorance and weakness" (1995:149). Certainly Gorki's laughter has an affectation of madness about it, particularly the raucous shrieks that end the song. There is something in the idea that this laughter is

¹⁴⁰ The Rock Agency is a sub-section of the AHS.

¹⁴¹ The band's contestations with the rock movement and *friki* culture more generally are discussed in Chapter Three.

¹⁴² This positioning 'between positions', and its relationship to laughter, is discussed in greater depth in the concluding part of this chapter.

presenting a weakness, or perhaps more accurately an identity is being constructed around the notion of 'low-status'. Taking Baudelaire's claim that laughter ceases at the point of absolute power (1995:149), then Gorki's forced, almost aggressively manic, non-Duchenne laughter is a recognition precisely of the band's *lack* of power, their *lack* of agency, and their *lack* of space in which to perform their identity; their Cubanness. In this light the surrounding rhetorical question – "how can I not laugh at the AHS?" – takes on an air of resignation. Laughter is the only response, the only option open to the band. "How can I not?" becomes "all I can do". Thus, in this bout of laughter is wrought the identity of the true outsider, where a bitter laugh, aimed as much at the self as at the enemy, is the only action available.

Yet through this recognition of weakness – this laughter of the madman – there is a profound defiance. If Baudelaire is correct in saying that "[t]he comic vanishes altogether from the point of view of absolute knowledge and power." (1995:149), then the fact that Porno Para Ricardo find so much to laugh about in the subject of the AHS – and by association the government to which the AHS owes its existence – calls into question the assumed 'absolute power' of both institutions. For how can one laugh at something with absolute power? In this laughter too is a recognition that despite the AHS's best efforts to silence the band, to render their message and ideas mute, they have still found an avenue through which to voice this defiance; a chink in the armour of the ostensibly invincible. This laughter could be said to have shades of Hobbes' laughter as a "sudden glory" (Hobbes, 1650 [1999], in Provine, 2000:14). It is a triumphal proclamation of the infirmity of the AHS, their failure in the task to silence the band. Maybe there is even a recognition of the inadequacy of the band's position pre-incarceration; laughter aimed at their own attempt to work 'within the system' and a confirmation of the eminency of their new, at the time these diptych albums were released (2006), radically defiant position.

Finally in relation to this complex, though brief, bout of laughter, It may be worth addressing Baudelaire's oft-cited maxim that "the Sage laughs not save in fear and trembling" (1995:148), as it may have some pertinence here. Baudelaire makes this assertion to illustrate the liminal position humanity holds between the superiority to the animal world, and the inferiority to God; laughter as "the sign of a *choc perpétuel* between two infinities" (Kevin Newmark, 1995:243). Though a much more grounded reading of this position of liminality must supplant Baudelaire's two 'infinities' in discussing the work of a Cuban punk band, there does appear to be a distinct recurring theme of liminality - an often deliberate positioning between two spaces conceived of as binary opposites (often,

purportedly, with no ‘gap’ between them) – in the band’s work. Though speculative, it is interesting to moot the notion of the ‘serious’ world of Cuban traditional music and the disdain the band have for *frikis*, or maybe the projected omnipotence of the Revolution, and the powerlessness of countercultural movements within the island, as being surrogate planes for Baudelaire’s more ethereal ‘Supreme Being’ and ‘natural world’; both binaries to which Porno Para Ricardo seem to place themselves deliberately ‘between’ (or ‘outside of’). Perhaps the band’s performed laughter stems, in part, from this perpetual shock, from this liminal position between worlds, from the ‘inferiority’ in relation to the legitimacy their music is given compared to traditional forms, and the ‘superiority’ they feel over *friki* music which offers “no communication” to a contemporary Cuban identity (Gorki, 2010). Or perhaps they are positioning themselves between, or removed from, the projected spaces of total power (and freedom) of those working “within the Revolution” and those who are ostensibly powerless, those cast “outside the Revolution”, questioning the absolutism of these two positions, and laughing as they do it, by placing themselves between the two: outside, but powerful: powerless, but Cuban.

As mentioned above, this song, as with many in Porno Para Ricardo’s oeuvre, dissolves into chaos, leaving Gorki in a more overtly performed role of the laughing madman. An almost unintelligible repetition of the song’s chorus gives way to raucous bouts of laughter interspersing frenetic ramblings. Many of the points made above hold for this climactic example of laughter, and needn’t be repeated. But it provides an apt point at which to conclude the multifarious roles of laughter in this song. It is simultaneously a recognition of the band’s own weakness and low status, their position as perpetual outsiders, yet also a defiant reminder of their assumed superiority to the *frikis* and a reflection of the impotence of the AHS in their ability to silence opposition. In this respect, it is both triumphant and profoundly sad. Yoani Sanchez again makes this salient point when suggesting that “what makes us roar with laughter would make us cry, if we couldn’t find a way to joke about it” (Sanchez, 2010). Most importantly, the laughter in *Peste a Ratas* constructs an exclusionary space of identity, where the identity of those who find the ‘joke’ funny is defined by opposition to those who would take offence. It is a derisory, non-Duchenne, performance of laughter; the darker half of Provine’s harlequin face that ostracises not only the victim (2000:2), but also ostracises the group laughing as outsiders. The band use this laughter to present themselves as outsiders; not only “outside the Revolution”, but outside of rhetoric that constructs a space ‘outside the Revolution’.

Examples of Duchenne Laughter

Because of their very nature as transient, spontaneous flashes, the examples of Duchenne laughter in Porno Para Ricardo's work are fleeting. However, they are nonetheless deliberate and significant in their brevity and occur abundantly throughout the band's albums. These moments are spontaneous responses to a present stimulus, yet the fact that they have been deliberately left in makes them a constituent and significant part of the soundworld, and thus able to reveal something of the band's identity.

There are several occasions when, as a song is ending (and descending into chaotic noise), laughter can be heard among the screeching guitars, cacophonous voices and pounding drums. As examples, I would cite '*Nueve Cuentos*' ('Nine Stories') and '*María*' from the album '*Rock Para Las Masas... (Cárnicas)*'¹⁴³ and '*Vamos Pa G*' ('Let's Go To G') from '*Soy Porno, Soy Popular*'¹⁴⁴. However, laughter in these instances is hard to isolate; it constitutes only one element of this chaotic soundworld and is not a prominent or prolonged enough to analyse as an exclusive entity. However, in the two between-song skits '*La Princesa Azul Del Mar Azul*' ('The Blue Princess of the Blue Sea') and '*Vete de Una Vez*' ('Stop at Once')¹⁴⁵, clearly isolatable instances of Duchenne laughter can be heard, both of which can be said to have been explicitly 'chosen' for incorporation¹⁴⁶ as laughter. These between-song skits are deliberately used as markers of identity, attempting to rekindle the feeling of a live performance to "make up somehow for the lack of being able to have a direct contact with the audiences" (Gorki, 2010) and to forge a space in which some sense of group (subcultural) identity can be expressed. Below, Gorki describes the purpose behind these skits on the "diptych" albums '*A Mi No Me Gusta...*' and '*Soy Porno...*':

It has 23 songs but many more tracks, because it has jokes, ideas, recorded performances invented by us whilst we were recording. And so, a little bit to make up for this part that we used to do with the band, which was to talk between songs and we made jokes to confuse people. (Gorki, 2010)

Yet as well as the crucial desire to re-establish a connection with, and create a space of belonging and shared identity for, the band's audience, in these moments of laughter specifically, one might find potential moments for inter-group solidarity. As opposed to the derisory laughter analysed above, in which an exclusionary space of identity is forged, in these 'natural' Duchenne moments of laughter, the band are creating an inclusionary identity space, in which a shared sense of humour – one which incorporates shared cultural

¹⁴³ Tracks two and six respectively.

¹⁴⁴ Track 20.

¹⁴⁵ Tracks 14 and 21 on *Rock Para Las Masas... (Cárnicas)* respectively.

¹⁴⁶ Where the laughter is part of a denser soundworld (as in the examples given above) may be more difficult to isolate and remove, and thus cannot be considered to be as deliberate in its inclusion.

experiences and knowledge, and a more or less tacit proclamation of ideology (both political and cultural) – is expressed, shared, consolidated, validated and strengthened. Not only do the band create a shared identity between themselves, but with this more inclusive type of laughter, they potentially open up that space to the listener, asking them to join in with the joke, not aimed at an ‘other’, but aimed at defining and reinforcing the collective ‘self’.

‘La Princesa Azul del Mar Azul’

This track, only twelve seconds in length, is one of the many between-song tracks, and is presented as a representation of the band’s activities between-recordings, appearing literally ‘between recordings’ (of two of the band’s most interesting works; a punk appropriation of the communist anthem ‘*La Internacional*’¹⁴⁷ and the cover of ‘*Los Músicos de Bremen*’, discussed in the previous chapter). The title (‘The Blue Princess of the Blue Sea’) appears to have nothing to do with the content of the track at all, giving a fairytale title to this most banal story of queuing to buy food. As Ciro plays an improvised melody on guitar in the background, Gorki, in faux-fairytale voice proclaims:

***No fui a la guardia por hacer la cola de la mortadella.
Ella tan bonita y tan sincella*** [laughter]

I didn’t go to the neighbourhood watch so I could join the queue for the mortadella
She is so beautiful and [sincere] [laughter]

The ‘verse’ is met with a short but hearty burst of laughter from Gorki himself and Ciro (Though Ciro’s laughter turns quickly into affectation; a deliberate squawk), before the sound of rustling papers (lyric sheets, perhaps, being arranged for a vocal take?) takes us into the next song. That Gorki laughs most prominently does not detract from the ‘group’ significance of this laughter; his laughter may not be the most prominent only because he is the only one laughing directly into a microphone. Robert Provine’s study into “laughter events” in everyday conversation shows that “speakers laughed significantly more than their audience” (1993:295). So rather than being an example of forced laughter, this example takes on a more ‘natural conversation’ feel to it (even if the ‘feed line’ for the ‘joke’ has been at least partially prepared in advance).

The actual source of comedy for this spontaneous laughter may be lost in translation, appearing to stem from a play on words creating a tautophony (underlined above) of ‘*ella*’ (substituting the word ‘*sincera*’ (sincere) for ‘*sincella*’). I am tentatively drawn to Robert

¹⁴⁷ Though this song does begin with an electric guitar playing the Communist anthem, this is an original composition.

Provine's assertion that in cases of naturally occurring laughter, "most pre-laugh dialogue is like that of an interminable television situation comedy scripted by an extremely ungifted writer" (1993:296). Certainly this would tend to ring true for the above example, as this example of Duchenne laughter does not necessarily follow something 'innately funny'¹⁴⁸. However, what is important here, and in all cases of spontaneous laughter, is not the joke itself, but rather the *context* in which the joke is being told.

This is a recording of the band (either real or staged) sharing time in the private space of their home recording studio. In a sense, this otherwise throw-away little amusement has been captured. The very ordinariness of this moment makes it significant by showing the audience the band members and their interrelationships in a 'natural' and spontaneous manner. It give us a glimpse at a private moment of the band. We the audience are allowed to step inside the private circle – the literally private space of the home recording studio, if only for twelve seconds. What we hear is that the band members laugh at the same silly joke, and because they do so, they display an engagement in social bonding through laughter, and display it through the potentially very public forum of an album. Although the moment itself may have been (at least partially) 'naturally occurring', spontaneous and personal, this moment of laughter, in a sense, becomes an Aleph for the band's identity. It is a space within which the band's identity can be expressed; a space in which their identity is *beld*. In this shared moment of laughter, what Porno Para Ricardo, as a single identity space, find funny is expressed. This is how they interact, this is what they consider 'valuable' enough to present as a track on our album. Unlike the example of laughter in '*Peste a Ratas*', where there is a definite 'victim' at which the laughter is aimed, and thus an exclusionary identity space is formed, this laughter creates an *inclusionary* identity space, one where the band can reinforce their group identity by sharing in the same sense of humour. Gorki's words become representative of the band (as they all find them funny) and the otherwise nonsensical verse becomes something of an 'in-joke' for the band; one which the listener, through sharing in the laughter, can 'buy into' and enter the inclusionary identity space.

Of course, as with all jokes, and all laughter, this example is not entirely all-inclusive. The joke itself is not merely a trite play on words; a nonsense poem spontaneously created. The inclusionary identity space fostered by this joke has to have something more than just laughter to it; there has to be more of a context. As such, it requires at least some cultural connection between the band and the listener, and as with so much of Porno Para

¹⁴⁸ Robert Provine, in this same study (1993) takes the oft-used phrase 'you had to be there' as evidence of this.

Ricardo's work, we are situated firmly within contemporary Cuba in this joke. The play on words, though meaningless in itself, does contain two specifically Cuban cultural reference points in its opening line:

No fui a la guardia por hacer la cola de la mortadella

I didn't go to the neighbourhood watch so I could join the queue for the mortadella

The neighbourhood watch is the task of the CDR (*'Comité de Defensa de la Revolución'* 'Committee for the Defence of the Revolution') - a government organisation present in each city block, responsible for reporting the 'un-revolutionary behaviour' of the neighbourhood - is one of the most present reminders of state repression and 'enforced' civic duty in Cuba (Kapcia, 2000). Similarly, having to queue, often for a considerable amount of time, often without reward, for the most mundane of goods (such as mortadella – a kind of processed ham) has, as Catherine Moses (2000) notes, become a near-ubiquitous phenomenon of Cuban life. So in combining these two specific cultural reference points, Gorki and the band are communicating a very personal, yet very shareable, joke; one which a Cuban listener could, if not find hilarious, then at least recognise and appreciate the context of. Such use of Cuban references further accentuates the notion of an inclusive identity space; it is one that offers a definition of "what 'we' are like" as opposed to the negative identity space outlined in *'Peste a Ratas'* which asserts "what 'we' are *not* like". It offers a brief window into a contemporary Cuban identity, and further serves to situate the band, and their music, within a broader Cuban narrative. Through recognition of that identity, the band find humour, and through the deliberate inclusion of that moment on a CD, they hope to share a common point of cultural reference among Cubans, creating an inclusionary moment of laughter where the listener can perhaps think 'I have experienced that too'. The following example, though utilising many of the same tropes as that outlined above, perhaps strengthens this claim of opening up an inclusionary space to audience as well as band members themselves.

'Vete de Una Vez'

In the example of *'Vete de Una Vez'* ('Stop at Once'), the 'dear listener' is addressed overtly and invited to become a part of the joke:

***Bien, ya estamos de nuevo con ustedes, queridos oyentes [laughter]
Esperemos que se hayan divertido con todos estos temas que le hemos
trasmitido en esta estelar trasmisión [laughter]***

Well, we are here again with you, dear listener. [laughter]
We hope that you have enjoyed all the songs that we have transmitted in this stellar
transmission. [laughter]

Following some vocal sabotage (possibly from Ciro) during recording, first Gorki, then a number of people obviously present as the recording was taking place, begin to laugh. Again, we hear Ciro's recognisable squawk in the background. Having recomposed himself, Gorki continues with the 'announcement' to the audience and on finishing, the group again crack up, at the recontextualisation of radio rhetoric. In a similar fashion to '*La Princesa Azul...*', a recognisable aspect of Cuban culture – this time the style of radio and television announcements – is taken and reinterpreted by the band, providing a moment of recognition, and potential access to the band's take on contemporary Cuban identity. This laughter is then subjected to a strange vocal effect, slowing it down and cutting it short. The joke is again one that utilises a sense of shared cultural reference points, and the subsequent laughter is inclusive, albeit inclusive within a distinctly Cuban cultural framework.

Gorki's speech gives a parodic (though certainly not overtly vicious or derisory) impersonation of the language and delivery style used on Cuban radio programmes; perhaps a pointed reference to the fact that Porno Para Ricardo have been banned from radio broadcasts (indeed all media broadcasts). The humour is then derived from the incongruity of a radio announcer transmitting Porno Para Ricardo's songs to "dear listeners", and the band's raucous laughter could be said to stem from a similar "laughter as dissociation", as with their take on the prohibitive AHS, yet another target of ridicule; hyperbolic and duplicitous speech, a media that seeks to silence the band, but is co-opted and warped by Porno Para Ricardo, incorporated into their sound, their songs, their identity. However, there is more of warmth to this laughter than with the derisory rhythmic stabs of '*Peste a Ratas*'. Rather than ridicule the source, there is more of a shared recognition of a distinct and unique cultural reference point here. Rather like the memories of '*Te Acuerdas de...*' or the cover version of '*Los Músicos de Bremen*', the aim is to establish these links between people around a recontextualised and augmented sense of Cuban identity. The faux-radio speech (replete with spontaneous laughter as response) is aimed and addressed to the listener (or to a particular type of listener). It creates something of an 'in-joke'; by understanding the reference, by recognising the incongruity of its place on a Porno Para Ricardo album, the listener is handed an invitation into the identity space created.

“Caught Between Two Infinities”

Laughter is a communicative tool, and in the instances shown herein, it is a sense of identity that is being communicated. The ways in which Porno Para Ricardo use laughter are indeed multifaceted, but are all common in the everyday. They use laughter to communicate their emotional state, to impact upon the emotional state of others (both the members of the band, and the audience listening), as a defence mechanism, as a way of trivialising stressful or upsetting situations, to help establish and reinforce group dynamics, to help integration into established groups, to help bring groups into existence, or to ridicule certain people, to make certain people or institutions the inauthentic other against which newly established group identities are pitted and defined.

If ‘laughter is defiance’ within certain constructs of Cubanness, then it is a trait that is shared, in part, by Porno Para Ricardo, and indeed by a wider range of broadly countercultural figures in contemporary Cuba. Yoani Sanchez’s description of laughter as a therapy against the stresses of everyday hardship and political oppression in Cuba demonstrates that, though the subject against which the laughter is directed has changed fundamentally since the days of Carlos Puebla’s musical defiance, the use of laughter as a tool to assert such defiance has not. In all these examples, laughter is used deliberately as a weapon – the dark side of the harlequin face (Provine 2000:2) – as an exclusionary space; a negative set in relief against all the things it is not; all the things it laughs at. In the “worldview characteristic” of Cubanness as defiant against repression and enemies (internal and external) (Hernandez and Dilla, 1992:31-2), laughter perhaps has been seen as one important marker and communicator of this defiant identity.

Yet, the examples of Porno Para Ricardo’s more subtle, more immediate, more spontaneous bouts of laughter demonstrate, if nothing else, that there are different ‘types’ of laughter, and “a wide array of often contradictory functions had been attributed to [it]” (Keltner and Bonanno 1997:699). In Porno Para Ricardo’s small, yet equally significant, flashes of Duchenne laughter, there is an attempt to form an inclusionary identity space around notions of ‘what we *are*’ rather than ‘what we’re opposed to’. These bursts of laughter are the response to previously established ‘in-jokes’, often based on a reading of very localised cultural reference points. The humour comes not from noticing a nuanced failing of one specific individual (or organisation etc), but from observing something unique about the culture in general; something that unites all, rather than uniting all *against one*. The inclusionary spaces of identity created by these peals of laughter begin as momentary establishments and reinforcements of the band’s solidarity and ‘togetherness’.

This laughter shows their unity, their shared sense of humour, the comfortableness to laugh, and as such, the same implied ideology. However, as the audience – the ‘dear listener’ of ‘*Vete de Una Vez*’ – is recognised as a constituent part of the recording (albeit one that comes after the act), and is addressed overtly and directly, then this inclusionary, though small, space is potentially opened up to the audience more generally. In the same way that the band’s albums strive to (re)create the atmosphere of the live concert, and the concomitant feeling of a group/subcultural movement/audience identity, these instances of laughter, deliberately *chosen* to appear on the albums, act in the same way. They provide sign posts, act as communicators of the band’s identity, and invite the listener to associate themselves with that identity, merely by laughing along; by finding the same things funny.

What do Porno Para Ricardo’s multifaceted bouts of laughter – some contrived, some spontaneous, all deliberately present on albums as representative of the band in some sense – say of their recontextualisation of Cubanness? Perhaps they are caught between the two infinities of the revolutionary authorities and the oppositional ‘*friki*’ subculture; between the two spaces of absolute power, and absolute lack of power. Not quite able to join either end of the spectrum, outside the Revolution, yet still vehemently Cuban, silenced, yet still able to make noise, they are left with laughter. Once again, this conclusion suggests Porno Para Ricardo are presenting themselves as existing outside (or alongside) established spaces of identity. They seek to augment notions of Cubanness, incorporating and recontextualising, making these powerful points of Cubanness both subjects of ridicule and remembrance; states which both warrant different types of laughter.

Chapter Six: Noise

“¡Sube el Volume!”

* * *

With a mischievous smile to the audience he bangs the now howling guitar off his crotch before hurling it up in the air. He picks it up and throws the guitar, almost playfully, up once more. The act thus far has an air of joviality about it – of play. Suddenly, on the guitar’s third return to earth, the relationship between guitarist and guitar turns acrimonious. With urgency, Gorki snatches the guitar from the floor and runs to the stage edge. With a mighty swing he smashed the guitar’s body off the corner of the stage. The noise of splintering wood is deep and profound, with overtones of swirling feedback. A rapid second blow, even harder, severs the guitar cable clean and the squeals cut out dead. Another blow. Gorki runs to the other side of the stage and repeats the act; the blows now becoming industrial, workmanlike, bereft of knowing glances to audience, entirely and exclusively engaged in this violent act. On the second blow at this new location, the guitar finally yields and explodes into pieces. Gorki brings the fragmented remains, still clinging together by the guitar strings, into the centre of the stage, the bastardised chords of ‘Chan Chan’ still being repeated over and over by the band. With bear hands he rips the electronics from the body of the guitar, and pummels the remains once more into the floor. A hollow, dead crash rings out, greeted by cheers from the audience. The body of the guitar splinters into mere shards, the neck split sheer in two, wires hang in confused clumps to remaining islands of wood.

Gorki takes this handful of detritus, the remains of an act of total destruction, and holds them out over the audience. A forest of clamouring hands sprouts, eager to consume these scant remains. Gorki tosses the destroyed guitar carefully into the crowd. A tussle ensues – the guitar’s fractured carcass is even more entirely devoured – and the tumultuous crowd is stilled. Gorki, egged on by this, rushes to the back of the stage, produces a t-shirt with the words “Yo Odio Los Castros¹⁴⁹” on. He holds it aloft to the audience. The forest of hands re-emerges as Gorki balls up the shirt and hurls it into the crowd. Again, another localised bout of movement where the t-shirt lands, before it is dragged to the depths and claimed by the strongest, most forceful hands. Gorki repeats the act with CDs, with another t-shirt, with anything he can find to throw. ‘Chan Chan’ loops over and over.

¹⁴⁹ “I hate the Castros”

Introduction: Finding Meaning in Noise

“Noise. Noises. Murmurs. When lives are lived and hence mixed together, they distinguish themselves badly from one another. Noise, chaotic, has no rhythm. However, the attentive ear begins to separate out, to distinguish the sources, to bring them back together by perceiving interactions” (Lefebvre, 2004:27).

For a band so enshrined in a deliberately ‘amateur’ aesthetic, it is hardly surprising to note that noise seems to be a perennial visitor to Porno Para Ricardo’s soundworld. Indeed their soundworld, in many respects, *is* noise; brash and assertive, yet potentially contradictory and confusing. From the more commonplace rock noises of heavily distorted guitars and pounding drums, to the punk aesthetics of occasionally out-of-tune instruments, fluffed notes, glitches and howls of feedback, to the shouts of instruction that bleed into the tracks; as songs disintegrate towards their end in flurries of noise, as serene soundscapes are punctured, as the sounds of both the public and the private realm are thrown together - made constituent parts of a far-from-blank sonic canvas upon which the band’s music often struggles to be heard - noise envelops the band, envelops their identity and obfuscates it’s delivery. Or perhaps the noise itself becomes the message; an apt vehicle for a complex identity.

To try and make sense of Porno Para Ricardo’s noise may appear to be a problematic task, not because of its ‘meaninglessness’, but because of its truly multifarious conglomeration of meanings. The band use noise to better sculpt their identity, and better define contemporary Cubanness as a space full of contradictions, confusions and overlapping (and competing) sounds. Yet there is another ‘layer’ of noise which sits outside of this aesthetic of “badness” (Angela Rodel, 2004); a layer of noise which cannot be solely attributed to the ‘punk’ characteristic of a “low level of technical proficiency” (ibid.:237). *Noises* are added to the band’s noise; incorporated and performed as a way to root themselves in the Cuban soundscape. Sounds of radio static, television jingles and half-heard conversations, faux news announcements, affectations (performed by the band) of the radio and television continuity announcers themselves, the familiar (familial?) deep, sonorous voices wrought out of conventional sound to express the crude play on revolutionary words which are Porno Para Ricardo’s stock-in-trade. These noises are deliberate additions to the sound world, representing and performing the background hum of noise in the city and in the home. These noises promote a sonic vista which attempts to bridge the schism between private and public faces of Cuban identity, melding ‘the streets’ of official Cuban identity with ‘the home’ of a (potentially) more clandestine Cubanness. But it also serves to present Porno Para Ricardo’s often controversial music as existing

within the quotidian soundscapes of Cuba, sonically anchoring the band to definite places, just as the lyrics of remembrance and naming places link them historically and geographically¹⁵⁰.

Noise and Identity/ Noise *as* Identity

Music is inscribed between noise and silence, in the space of the social codification it reveals. Every code of music is rooted in the ideologies and technologies of its age, and at the same time produces them (Attali, 1985:19).

As Jacque Attali attests, the often negative epithet ‘noise’ is often presented as the malleable, ever-shifting boundary line to the equally transient identity space formed around the word ‘music’. The topic – the *word* – ‘noise’ occupies a hotly debated and almost reified position within contemporary musicological analysis, and as Simon Reynolds points out, any analysis of noise is fraught with difficulties:

The problem is that, to speak of noise, to give it attributes, to claim things for it, is immediately to shackle it with meaning again, to make it part of culture. If noise is where language ceases, then to describe it is to imprison it again with adjectives (2004:56).

As such, more nuanced accounts of the definitions of this convoluted term are best left to bespoke works on the subject. As far as is possible, in this chapter I am using the term ‘noise’ in its most neutral, everyday sense. Portions of sound which deliberately break down the established musical structures of the song, disrupting the musical messages being delivered, and instances where distinctly non-musical sounds are incorporated into the recording, will be the subjects of analysis. I suggest of these sections of sound that, rather than confuse the identity/ message being delivered to the listener, they in fact become part of the ‘confused message’ itself. Doubtless this definition is open to critique, but for the examples of noise I am concerned with in this chapter – where a sound (or sounds) seem to be encroaching upon a recognisably musical soundworld (as opposed to musics where noise is a principal aspect) – the definition of noise as short bursts of sound that ostensibly obfuscate a more readily recognisable musical message is sufficient.

Noise, in this sense, plays an almost ubiquitous role in the soundworld of Porno Para Ricardo, and it becomes a crucial constituent part of their identity. However, once again, it is a trope of identity construction being pulled in opposite direction simultaneously. For noise here is both a destructive force, and a representative force. At one moment it is seeking to penetrate and disrupt the ‘signal’ of ‘Cuban sound’, perhaps even attempting to expand the parameters of this often closed space by breaking it apart, and rebuilding it with

¹⁵⁰ See Chapters One and Two respectively.

the ‘noise’ itself incorporated; a process or ‘reterritorialisation’. Yet at another moment, noise is used to represent the everyday; to celebrate and claim an identity within the quotidian and the symbiotically linked – yet often held apart - ‘noisescapes’ of the city and the home; the communal and the private.

As many theorists in many different disciplines have shown, ‘noise’ can be the herald of numerous different, often contrasting, messages. It may simultaneously be “a signal that *we* do not want to hear” and a “signal that *someone* does not want us to hear” (Russo and Warner 2004:53), an “audible acoustic energy that adversely affects the physiological or psychological well-being of people” (Kryter, 1985:1), and also “sounds which are unwanted and possibly also loud and objectionable” (Burns, 1973:7). Within these varying definitions, a common thread connecting them is the conception of noise as something ‘getting in the way’ of a signal. From this perspective, noise becomes “a signal the sender does not want to transmit” (Moles, 1968:78-9), something that obfuscates and makes less intelligible a distinct message being communicated to an audience.

Whilst there is some truth in this assertion, Mary Russo and David Warner add an important, problematising question to Moles’ definition. “What if the sender wants to transmit a deliberately noisy signal, acoustically or otherwise?” (2004:48). What if the message being communicated is complicated, partial (in both senses of the word) and confusing? Perhaps not only would the signal be noisy, but noise would be a relevant way in which to express that message. Noise can thus be seen as a force breaking down the conventional barriers of space; a barrage that ‘damages’. Such conceptions run along the well-ploughed furrows of Deleuzian ‘deterritorialisation’ (and subsequent ‘reterritorialisation’) of a space. Noise, then, could be seen as helping to topple conventional conceptions of what constitutes music, and re-establishing the parameters to incorporate itself. However, in the pursuit of defining and redefining an identity, both at individual and national levels, again the concept of ‘co-territorialisation’ perhaps becomes more useful¹⁵¹. Certainly in *Porno Para Ricardo*’s noise one can detect an illumination of some of the parameters of identity construction. But it is not necessarily a destructive practice, or ever a reconstructive one, but a augmentative practice; one that does not seek to hybridise conventional conceptions of Cuban identity, but supplement them, claim them and incorporate them. *Porno Para Ricardo*’s identity – their Cubanness – is both noisy and best expressed *by* noise.

¹⁵¹ See Chapter Four.

Leaving the argument of what constitutes ‘noise’ aside, perhaps we can say that the labelling of sound *as* noise can also give some indication of identity. If, as Simon Reynolds (2004) suggests, noise itself is the point at which sound becomes unknowable, at which any message ceases to be transmitted, then the point at which this line in the sonic sand is drawn in varying socio-cultural settings, that is the point at which different communities find nothing of meaning in a sound, can perhaps provide a telling description of some facet of identity. What is *not heard*, and what is discarded as ‘unhearable’ are markers of a sort of ‘identity-in-relief’, just as what is clung to as ‘meaningful sound’ (i.e. music) is indicative of a more positive identity construction. Returning to the Attali quote that opens this section, if “music is inscribed between noise and silence, in the space of the social codification it reveals” (1985:19), then ‘noise’ provides the barrier at which music ceases. In a nation such as Cuba, where popular music has often been instrumental in reflecting a sense of national identity, the defining of certain musics as noise – that is incapable of conveying a message – serves to demarcate both the space of what is deemed ‘within the Revolution’ and also what is deemed ‘outside the Revolution’. Two identity spaces are defined in the labelling of noise.

As Ian Biddle suggests, this distinction between, and labelling of, the spaces of ‘noise’ and ‘music’ is far from clear cut, and far from fixed:

As a system by which the conceptual territories noise/music/silence are mapped and managed, the political ontology of sound is also a political theory of relationships... Class, ideology, race and gender are all visitors to this process of naming, of holding apart, and holding in mutually exclusive relation the three territories [of music, noise and silence] (2009:2).

So, if aspects of one’s identity – race, class, gender, ideology etc – are all visitors in individual definitions of what constitutes noise, perhaps one may switch perspectives to suggest that how one uses, and what one considers as, ‘noise’ can be visitors in providing insight into one’s identity. Identity shapes the space delineated as ‘noise’, and thus noise becomes a mirror reflecting identity¹⁵². In this sense, noise can serve as one of the many gateways into a constructed space of identity; at once either an exclusionary barrier, or an inclusive shared line of demarcation. To find a shared meaning in something that someone else sees no value in, is to share some sense of commonality. For Porno Para Ricardo to present ‘noise’ to the wider Cuban population (certainly to the government), yet to have

¹⁵² It is important to add that the identity of the noise producer *and* the listener are reflected back upon one another, creating a feedback loop that is, in itself, ‘noisy’, creating something of a Venn diagram in which identity-created spaces of noise overlap and a common space of what constitutes noise (and thus a common space of identity) may be found. Thus audiences are – or would be, were Porno Para Ricardo afforded a more open channel to such a live, conglomerated audience – complicit in constructing the space of ‘noise’ and imbuing it with meaning/ identity.

that noise listened to as meaningful sound – music – by a select few is to help to forge a group identity, with the parameters of what constitutes noise as one point of access (or a point of defence) in the potentially-permeable membrane of identity space. Once more, noise exists as an example of a fragment of identity that can be both exclusionary and inclusionary simultaneously.

In this sense, following the analysis presented in Chapter Five, the use of ‘noise’ in representing an identity is somewhat akin to the use of laughter in speech¹⁵³ in that it is used as a sort of meta-communicative marker, helping to emphasise and shape the meaning of the ‘message’ and its understanding and reception by the listener. Noise, as used by *Porno Para Ricardo*, is an embellishment to the message, a flourish to, and amplification of, their identity, a recognition that the construction and dissemination of an identity is a complex and ‘messy’ process. Noise becomes integral in deciphering, and giving meaning to their soundworld, and thus to their place as Cuban musicians. Divorced from context, both these categories – noise and laughter – seem to be points at which the conventional message delivery systems of music and speech can be problematised. However, in both cases, not only do laughter and noise seek to embellish and mould the meanings of their preceding linguistic/musical messages, they add their own, discrete messages, albeit ones that are potentially confused and much more open to interpretation. Perhaps, indeed, each of these non-verbal communicative devices is deliberately used by the band as a mirror to reflect to audiences their own identity, as they will inevitably make sense of these ‘noisy messages’ with their own set of prejudices, partialities and facets of personal identity.

‘Sube el Volumen’: Making Chachacha Noisy

“*Chachacha, Qué Malo el Basílón*” (‘Chachacha, How Bad the Party’) is track two on *‘Soy Porno, Soy Popular’*. Presented as a bastardised chachacha¹⁵⁴ with electric guitars, sneered ‘punk’ vocals, fluffed lead guitar notes and explicit lyrics for the first one minute and twenty seconds or so, a distinctly ‘noisy’ vocal interruption from Gorki is the herald for a remainder of a track revelling in several distinct ‘types’ of noise. Following a riotous saxophone solo, backed by the sound of laughter, talking and partying, the song crescendos to a climax, repeating the chorus:

¹⁵³ Taking Robert Provine’s claim that “although laughter remains enigmatic behaviour, it is one of our species’ most prominent and perhaps functionally significant vocalisations” (1993:298), I suggest that noise can be a ‘significant vocalisation’, though ‘non-verbal’, in the dissemination of meaning within music.

¹⁵⁴ This song owes its origins to the chachacha evergreen *‘Que Rico el Vasilón’* by Rosendo Ruiz.

Rock and roll, que rico es rock and roll
*Chachacha, que malo es chachacha*¹⁵⁵

Rock and roll, how great is rock and roll
Chachacha, how bad is chachacha

The ‘noise’, in every sense of the word, increases with every repetition as the song flits between decreasingly lucid chachacha sections and increasingly anarchic rock sections; both, in their inverse trajectories, becoming more ‘noisy’, though in different ways. Perhaps this multifarious use of ‘noise’ in the song is the ultimate noise, providing a confusing skein of potentially decipherable, and often contradictory, messages. Thus it becomes harder to pin down the band’s relationship to chachacha. Determining if tradition is the subject of ridicule or the subject of a humorous pastiche, or if it is being reclaimed and recontextualised (reterritorialised?) by the band and incorporated into their soundworld as part of ‘their’ Cuban identity becomes problematic. Similarly the band’s relationship to rock music becomes confusing here. Concerns over rock’s potential “lack of communication” (Gorki, 2010) to a Cuban identity, or still further, the negation of the perceived incompatibility of ‘traditional’ and ‘contemporary’ voices of Cuban identity all add their voices to this truly noisy soundscape.

Confusing Noise: A Foreground Saxophone and Background Voice

The noise begins in “*Chachacha...*” in earnest with the unexpected¹⁵⁶ addition of a saxophone solo halfway through the song. As the Saxophone screeches and howls away, the band appear to ‘retreat’ from the foreground of the track, becoming literally ‘background noise’ on their own recording. Bouts of laughter, conversation and general sound¹⁵⁷ are heard, but are never fully present as they are never fully decipherable. Indeed, their ‘positioning’ so far back in the mix suggests they are not designed to be heard; their voices become so much noise.

This incongruous and deliberately overly-loud saxophone solo seems to confuse the message being delivered to the listener; or perhaps more accurately, to (potentially) mask the vocal message that a Porno Para Ricardo listener may be seeking, or hoping to find; one of direct rebelliousness and political dissent as voiced through the stylistic traits of punk. Thus the howl of the saxophone may be seen to fall under Abraham Moles definition of noise as “any undesirable signal in the transmission of a message” (1968:78) in

¹⁵⁵ See Appendix for full lyrics.

¹⁵⁶ The addition of a saxophone is ‘unexpected’ in that it represents a musical addition from someone not in the band, rather than being unexpected in relation to an imitation of the genre of chachacha.

¹⁵⁷ At one point, it sounds as though someone knocks on the microphone, followed by more laughter.

that, if searching for a ‘punk’ message in this song, one which appears to be pillorying a ‘sacred cow’ of Cuban identity (i.e. chachacha), the listener is almost distracted by the clear musicality, though possibly jovial irreverence, of the saxophone sound. This interpolating instrument is made to stand in stark contrast to the distinctly (and deliberately) amateur aesthetic and otherwise protective and staunchly DIY approach of the rest of Porno Para Ricardo’s oeuvre. As Dave Laing points out, the notion of overt, melodic musicality is often eschewed by punk musicians in aiding the clear delivery of ‘the message’:

...by excluding the musicality of singing, the possible contamination of the lyric message by the aesthetic pleasures offered by melody, harmony, pitch and so on, is avoided. Also avoided is any association with the prettiness of the mainstream song, in its form as well as its contents (1985:54).

Words that mirror Gorki lyrical manifesto, as outlined here in interview with Petr Placák:

All the art that is produced in this country is, in some way, masked by a double meaning, and so I am tired of these poetic lyrics full of indirect insinuation. The time has come to call things by their real name. What interests us is to say in out lyrics that this hell we live in has a name and a surname: Fidel Castro Ruz. I don’t need any poetic resources to say that (Gorki, in Placák, 2006).

Although the saxophone solo in ‘*Chachacha...*’ could not entirely accurately be labelled ‘pretty’, the implicit connotation of a ‘saxophone solo’ are intact. Thus, in the context of a punk song, the implied musical message is heard as being at odds with the ‘expected’ message of a cultural-political punk song denigrating a ‘traditional’ cultural form.

This confusion of the ‘expected’ message by the presence of a saxophone solo is made all the more pertinent by its placing ‘over’ and ‘above’ the vocals. As the saxophone powers to the foreground, the ‘vocals’¹⁵⁸ provided by all four members of the band, retreat to the rear of the soundscape. Though the odd word is audible¹⁵⁹, most of this speech is unintelligible, until Gorki ‘remembers’ it is time to do his solo (“*coño, es mi solo*”) and returns to the foreground of the track to deliver the declamatory and distinctly unambiguous message to the listener: “*rock and roll; que rico es rock and roll. Chachacha; que malo es chachacha*”. The re-emergence of the voice to the foreground ends, and thus simultaneously confirms, the positioning of the voice as background noise in this confused portion of the song. The place of noise as mask for the voice is described by both Dave Laing in a specifically musical sense and by Karl D. Kryter in more general terms. Laing points out the assumed importance of the voice in delivering a message to the audience when writing:

¹⁵⁸ Although in this portion of the song, the voices are heard in speech, I would tend to categorise them as a ‘vocal performance’, inasmuch as the spoken word (as opposed to the ‘sung word’) is as integral a part of the band’s oeuvre, and is crucial throughout their work in delivering some ‘message’ to the listener. Thus, when the voices here retreat to the background of the track, it is accompanied by a distinct feeling of ‘missing out’ on some message.

¹⁵⁹ A couple of swear words are heard; the ubiquitous cry of “*de pinga!*”, and “*Coño*”, alongside laughter.

Typically in popular music recording what is foregrounded is the voice. This point can perhaps be supported negatively in that the listener notices (often with a sense of frustration) when the voice 'disappears' into what is significantly called the 'backing'. The frustration comes from a problem of comprehension (not being able to decipher the words) but also from the withdrawal of the opportunity of identification (1985:54).

Kryter makes a similar point about noise as obfuscating the seemingly always important message-delivery system of the voice:

The most common complain about noise is that it interferes with or masks speech signals. Indeed, the masking of speech by noise greatly reduces the performance of work that involves speech communication... The masking of speech by noise appears to be the most harmful effect noise has upon people from the point of view of either practical, economic consequences, or emotional reactions (1985:58).

Though Kryter's words are applied literally to the world of industry, thus words such as 'mask', 'performance of work', 'communication' etc are to be understood in a literal sense, they can be made to apply more theoretically, particularly when read alongside Laing's view on the importance of the voice in popular music, to analyse the 'noise' of 'masked' or 'indecipherable' speech within this example. In becoming indecipherable within this portion of the song, the voices themselves become noise, as they can offer no identification and thus no message to the listener. The effect of these 'background noise' voices on the listener is perhaps a disconcerting feeling of being placed outside of, or beyond the reach of, a message. Clearly something is being said in this part of the song, but the listener cannot conclude whether he or she can identify with it. Thus the signal becomes sullied, the identity markers unclear, and thus the voice becomes noise. The result is a confusion that is not only applicable to, and contained within, this section of the song (the listener is unable to understand what is being said within this section), but also bleeds out to cast confusion over the intended message of the rest of the song. Again, and in contrast to the usually direct assertion of *Porno Para Ricardo*'s lyrics, here it becomes difficult to pin down precisely the subject of ridicule and what is being 'said' both about chachacha and about the band's appropriation of it. In this noise, the band's identity becomes much more difficult to determine, and all these concerns are left ambiguous in this noise. Unless one shifts one's perspective and begin to see the noise *as* the signal, rather than seeking to disguise, confuse or usurp it.

Noise as Signal

The above analysis of noise as ‘confusing a signal’ makes the supposition that a hypothetical listener to this song would have a desired or assumed message – a message they wanted to take away from the song – when beginning the process of listening. Based on the knowledge this hypothetical listener may have of the band, and on the title alone of the song, the implied message is one of at least ridicule, and perhaps something more pointed, at a ‘traditional’ bastion of Cuban identity – chachacha¹⁶⁰ – and thus vicariously, at some intangible facet of the politically-delineated, ‘narrow’ Cuban identity. However, as the voice is ‘pushed’ back by this distinctly ‘un-punk’ saxophone, the message, and the voice, are masked. Thus the “classical textbook definition [of] noise [as] ‘any undesirable signal in the transmission of a message’ (Moles, 1968:78, in Russo and Warner, 2004:48) is arrived at. However as Russo and Warner, again citing Moles, point out, there is no a priori distinction between noise and signal:

There is no absolute structural difference between noise and signal. The only difference which can be logically established between them is based exclusively on the concept of intent on the part of the transmitter. A noise is a signal the sender does not want to transmit (Moles, 1968:78-9, in Russo and Warner, 2004:48).

The ‘signal’, both literally and figuratively, being sent in ‘*Chachacha, Qué Malo el Basilón*’ is ‘noisy’ in the sense that the overt social commentary a prospective audience might be expecting to hear in the message of the song has become obfuscated. However, because this is a ‘home recording’, conceived and executed by the band themselves with no exterior interference, a case can be made that everything present in the soundworld is *part of the intended signal*. It seems that here is an example of a deliberately ‘noisy’ signal.

Porno Para Ricardo’s apparent perennial self-positioning ‘between’ positions, seeking to blur the boundaries between polemicised positions, can perhaps be read into this confusing noise. The signal is deliberately made noisy as the place this stalwart genre of ‘traditional’ Cubanness has within both their identity and as a symbol of contemporary Cubanness is problematised. On the one hand, there is a feeling of ownership over chachacha, on the other a desire to affirm the place of punk within the reconfigured Cuban soundscape. But these two genres, these two ideological identity positions, are not mutually exclusive. There is a noisy hinterland that connects them, and it is from this space that Porno Para Ricardo send their message. The band do not exclusively reify punk at the expense of deauthenticating chachacha, as a simplistic reading of the noisy exchange between genres that concludes the song may suggest (the noise of punk winning out over conservative and

¹⁶⁰ See Masvidal, 2007

anachronistic chachacha music). Rather, this song reclaims chachacha. Porno Para Ricardo position themselves as something of a custodian over this stalwart of Cuban identity, claiming it as a constituent part of their identity. But crucially they ameliorate it, blend it with punk, to contemporise its meaning and make it speak for a modern Cuban identity. Simon Reynolds suggests that “the pleasure of noise lies in the fact that the obliteration of meaning and identity is ecstasy” (2004:56), but in this example, the pleasure of noise is found in the fact that it is an apposite medium to express a confused (or confusing) identity of contradiction; that one can love, and find a shard of personal identity within, both tradition and modernity, within both chachacha and rock and roll: a noisy signal for a noisy identity.

This assertion is backed up by the confusing ‘amended lyrics’ of the second chorus, where Gorki begins “*chachacha; que rico es chachacha...*” (“chachacha; how great is chachacha”) only to resolve this alteration by stating “*rock and roll, esta mejor, mejor*” (“rock and roll is better”).

In interview Gorki makes overt the oscillation between these dual identities:

When they ask me ‘what influences do you have in the band as a musician’, I always say well, Led Zeppelin, which is one of the bands I have listened to most since I was a teenager and the Sex Pistols. And then I said my mum, because my mother always had a musical environment in the house. She used to work with music. She used to put the radio on – *Radio Progreso*¹⁶¹ – and she’d put these long radio shows on with music – like a disco – so the environment surrounding me was rural music and boleros and the like, and mum used to love to sing whilst she was working so, right now, I like bolero and Cuban music in general just as much as I like rock and roll – well I like rock and roll a bit more, but I like Cuban music just as much (Gorki, 2010).

A conflict between integral, but disparate parts of a piecemeal musical identity is expressed by Gorki here in the flitting between which of these opposing influences – rock and roll or traditional Cuban genres such as bolero – is “liked more”. If Russo and Warner suggestion that “noise is, and always has been, inscribed in all sound and music” (2004:49) is followed, then it could be suggested that noise (in this guise as confusing a ‘pure signal’) is always present in identity construction. Seemingly contradictory factors in which some aspect or reflection of ourselves may be found are constantly rubbing up against one another. Gorki, and Porno Para Ricardo as a band, cannot be ‘purely’ (i.e. exclusively) defined as having a ‘punk identity’, or being in contrast to a ‘traditional Cuban identity’. Thus the conventions of those clearly comprehensible identities (however idealised they may be) are made ‘noisy’ by additions from other aspects. In this sense, the ‘noisy’ confusing signal Porno Para Ricardo are sending out in this portion of the song is the clearest – or most truthful –

¹⁶¹ *Radio Progreso* is one of Cuba’s national radio stations.

expression of an identity which itself is confused and multifarious, impossible to pin down or transmit in its entirety. In the concluding repetition of the chorus, this noisy amelioration of identities is further played out.

Expanding the Parameters of Cuban Sound

After Gorki ‘remembers’ to play his solo – a tightly orchestrated riff that emerges from the loose assemblage of sound that is this confusing middle section – we are led back into the chachacha chorus, the mantra extolling rock and roll over chachacha beginning its long cycle of repetition. Yet it is a repetition that veers off into two opposite, though equally noisy, directions. As the song lurches between the two musical genres, chachacha and rock, it does so in increasingly erratic fashion. The chachacha repetitions in the chorus combine jangly guitars, cowbell, and a close-mic vocal style which exemplifies Phil Tagg’s definition of a vocal style that creates “an intimate/confidential dialogue” (1981:13) between the singer and the listener, though it is an intimacy that descends into a pseudo-lasciviousness, Gorki drawling and moaning the word ‘*rico*’ into the microphone. The vocals become less and less coherent, as Gorki’s impersonation of the sensual *bolero* crooner disintegrates into unintelligibility, and the guitars warp themselves out of tune. The rock portions of the chorus substitute in distorted guitars, pounding crash cymbals and a vocal style representative of what Dave Laing describes as “a public and declamatory [vocal style], which reflects a greater distance between the voice singing and the ears listening” (1985:56-7).

This vocal style, as with its ‘intimate’ chachacha counterpart, similarly lurches towards unintelligibility, the familiar punk rasp and sneer stalk the words with ever-increasing vigour as the soundworld around them further dismantles itself. Midway through one of the ‘rock sections’, Gorki, in his ‘own voice’, neither singing nor acting but apparently commanding his fellow band members, shouts “*sube el volumen!*” (“turn up the volume!”). The desire is to literally make the track noisier, to engulf the band, presented as performing the piece live, in their own noise as they create it, they themselves becoming lost in the noise. As the repetition winds its way to the end, the ‘rock’ soundworld encroaches more and more upon that of chachacha, submerging it, encompassing it. Hammering tom-toms herald the re-arrival of rock section ever earlier in the chachacha sections, guitars seem more reticent to shed themselves of distortion as the ‘quiet sections’ return. As the piece ends, it appears as though rock has ‘won out’ in some sense. Gorki’s rasping, held note bridging the gap between a false ‘rockified chachacha’ ending and the real, thoroughly rock

ending (chords IV, V, I, clipped short and distorted, replete with nonsensical gibbering and yelp from Gorki; noisy to the last).

It is tempting to present this portion of the song as displaying a confused (and confusing) message reflecting a 'noisy' identity. Perhaps it also speaks of a deliberate desire to 'reterritorialise' notions of the Cuban identity by encroaching upon, destroying, and rebuilding its soundworld to incorporate the band's own sonic identity. However, in a sense this final bout of noise allays the confusion of its saxophone-toting forbear not by destroying and rebuilding the conception of the Cuban soundworld (and identity) but by demonstrating that these two ostensibly incompatible and contrasting definitions of Cuban identity (chachacha and rock) already exist within one, larger, space of Cuban identity; that the two may be emulsified, and crucially claimed by this younger generation of Cubans and that to claim one does not mean to rescind upon the other. In this noisy crucible, rock and chachacha are made bedfellows in an ever changing, ever-blending (and ever-noisy) definition of Cuban identity, where no territory is ever fully and rigidly constructed, and thus never necessarily torn down and reconstructed.

The notion of noise as *reconstructive* as well as destructive is outlined most notably by Jaques Attali, who suggests that while "music... provides a rough sketch of the society under construction, [...] with noise is born disorder and its opposite: the world." (Attali, 1985:5-6). Except that in this instance, it is *noise* that is being used by Porno Para Ricardo to sketch a more holistic, more accommodating, portrait of the Cuban musical identity. Noise is being used to reflect a disordered world, one in which modernity and tradition can be allowed to meld and in which the band and their generation can stake a claim of ownership to both styles of music, can meld and modify both. A choice between the two distinct opposites – a schismatic trope so familiar in Cuban discourse – is not only shown as undesirable, but proven to be a false dichotomy. One may appreciate chachacha and rock music, and find aspects of one's own identity within both.

Attali goes on to suggest that music should be seen "as a succession of *orders*... done violence by *noises*... that are *prophetic*... because they create new orders, unstable and changing" (Attali 1985:19). Porno Para Ricardo's disintegrating, noisy, outro seeks exactly this; a new definition, albeit a fragile and malleable one, of the Cuban sound. It is not a 'reterritorialisation' of the territory of Cuban identity that the band seek in this noise, but rather a blurring of the boundaries between a schismatic *choice* between contrasting musical identities. In the white-hot noise of this ending, it becomes impossible to prise apart the two soundworlds of chachacha and rock as they collide into one another. It is a noise

aimed as much at rock music as it is at Cuban tradition. As noted in Chapter Three (and throughout this work) Porno Para Ricardo's consternation with *friki* culture often hinges on their rescinding of the 'right' to claim Cuban traditional music as part of their identity; leaving the space of the 'authentic Cuban musician' (and music) intact, as well as their *mimetismo* of rock's cultural conventions, which can tend towards a rigid codification of the genre that leaves it unable to accurately voice a contemporary Cuban identity. What Porno Para Ricardo's noisy inculcation of tradition and rock seeks to assert is that both spaces are constantly malleable and constantly changing, are not in need of wilful destruction or reconstruction, as this process is always already ongoing. This noisy space helps to pan out from these specific musical identities, to reveal that they are both housed under a much larger rubric and understanding of what constitutes a contemporary Cuban identity.

Familiar Noise(s): Locating the Soundscape

Wherever we are, what we hear is mostly noise. When we ignore it, it disturbs us. When we listen to it, we find it fascinating. The sound of a truck at fifty miles per hour. Static between the stations. Rain. We want to capture and control these sounds, to use them not as sound effects but as musical instruments. (John Cage, 2004:26)

It is not only noise, but noises, that constitute a large part of Porno Para Ricardo's sound world. Sounds of conversations, telephones ringing, televisions blaring out recognisable TV theme tunes, radios scanning through static, all find their way onto the band's albums. In short, represented as an integral part of Porno Para Ricardo's soundworld is the '*bullá*' ('noise') of Cuba; the noise of the familiar. Both the noise of the bustling streets of Havana and the more intimate noises of the home are melded into a single 'noisy' soundscape. In much the same way that '*Chachacha, Que Malo el Basilón*' places both tradition and rock into a singular frame, so the public and private soundscapes are housed as constituent, oscillating parts of an identity. These noises are used as something of a potentially inclusionary identity marker. Porno Para Ricardo are attempting to represent the familiar to those for whom it *sounds* familiar; the soundworld of Havana – both private and public – is made part of the band's soundworld; they exist within the contemporary Cuban soundscape. Yet, crucially, the band are also attempting to claim their musical sound as part of the Havana soundworld. Not only do they exist within Cuban sound, but Cuban sound exists within them.

'Intro': *Making the Private Public*

That most popular and influential of all recent inventions, the radio, is nothing but a conduit through which prefabricated din can flow into our homes. And this din goes far deeper, of course, than the ear-drum. It penetrates the mind. (Aldous Huxley, 1944:218-9)

The sound of the radio, as many theorists on the subject have suggested, is often a short hand symbol for the sound of the familial; part of the tapestry of sound that creates the 'sound of home'. Jo Tacchi suggests that "radio sound creates a textured 'soundscape' in the home, within which people move around and live their daily lives... radio sound is experienced as a part of the material culture of the home, and... contributes greatly to the creation of domestic environments" (Tacchi, 1998:26). The sound of radio still holds a prominent place in the soundscape of many Cuban homes. For many families, it is still the primary source of news and entertainment.¹⁶² The ubiquity of the radio in Cuban homes sees the medium fulfil Tacchi's espoused roles as "friend" and "company" (ibid.) for the listener. But the radio is also crucial in providing information, both political and cultural, and in shaping the soundscape of a national identity.

As noted above, the radio was certainly a ubiquitous sound source in Goki's home as a child, so the decision to open their first album with the sound of a radio scanning through reams of static to find a radio announcement (as in the track '*Intro*' from '*Rock Para Las Masas...*') would appear to immediately seek to link the band to a recognisably 'Cuban noise' from the outset. This opening noise creates something of a familiar/ familial fanfare to the album; one that is perhaps shattered (or at least questioned) in the ensuing 'noise' of their punk rock songs, but one that is perhaps symbolic of the band's whole ethos. Here we have a familiar Cuban sound - the radio - playing salsa and relaying current affairs in serious tones¹⁶³, yet, tellingly, these prominent and instantly recognisable sounds emanating from the radio (each plays for less than a second on the track) are spikes of sound pushing through a relentless barrage of 'noise'. As Abraham Moles succinctly puts it, in most orthodox uses, "shocks, crackling, and atmospherics are noises in a radio transmission" (Moles 1968:78). But for Porno Para Ricardo, in this opening track, the static and crackles are integral parts of the message being relayed. Noise, once more, *is* the signal, confusing, but also recontextualising a sonic symbol of Cubanness.

¹⁶² Vincenzo Perna illustrates the importance of the radio in Cuba, claiming that one bridge spanning the schism of the 1959 Revolution is that "radio continued to be crucial in orienting musical tastes and determining popularity and prestige of popular musicians (Acosta, 1990)" (Perna, 2005:75), further asserting that radio is still "the most popular local medium for music" (ibid.:80).

¹⁶³ The sound of the solemn news/speaking clock radio station '*Radio Reloj*' can be heard emerging from the static.

Once more, the concept of ‘reterritorialisation’ as discussed above could be read into this recorded act of ‘searching through the static’. When Gorki punctures and concludes the search with his faux-newscast extolling the band, it is as though the reterritorialisation is complete: the white noise which dismisses the cornerstones of Cuban radio sound stops at a point where Porno Para Ricardo are melded with conventional (clichéd) radio speak. The band are literally putting the noise back into the traditional signals coming from this familiar source of ‘home sound’, celebrating the gaps in between the stations by lingering on the noises between them. They then reconstruct the conception of ‘Cuban sound’, and thus ‘Cuban identity’, to include themselves as a legitimate expression of these interrelated spaces (and asserting that these spaces exist *within the band*). The band are performing and reimagining a Cuban sound where, if one searches through the noise for long enough, one may come across their sound. Once heard, this sound must be considered as existing together with the familiar stations along this line of static.

Yet for all this destructive/reconstructive noise, the actual sonic language, once it is arrived at, remains relatively intact and recognisable. Though the content of Gorki’s speech may parody, and thus ridicule, Cuban radio speech, and in turn may serve to implicitly question what music is allowed onto the airwaves, recontextualising and subverting the meaning and usage of the radio, that it is still a deliberately *Cuban* radio announcement is crucial to the understanding of this track. ‘*Intro*’ does not so much remould the territory, as represent Porno Para Ricardo’s place within its familiar environs. Although, as Geoffrey Baker notes, radio airplay is not nearly as important to underground musicians as it was even a decade ago, given the rise in importance of USB stick dissemination of music (2011:6), nevertheless, the radio remains a near-ubiquitous part of the Cuban quotidian soundscape, often, as Tacchi notes of the radio more generally, “so familiar that it is unremarkable” (1998:25). Though delivered through their own unique lens, Porno Para Ricardo are celebrating an aspect of the everyday, and recognising a distinctly important aspect of their shared soundscape. They are not only identifying an instantly recognisable and identifiable tenet of quotidian Cubanness, they are elevating it to a position of high importance; the first track on their first album. This is more than just a critique of the band’s absence from the radio waves, not a punk parody of the obsolescence of the crackling radio signal, this is an invocation of a familiar, and shared, Cuban soundscape; one that still has the potential to unite Cubans around a shared moment of private listening. Crucially, the band are aligning themselves with this most Cuban of Cuban sounds from the very outset of their recording career. They are positioning themselves as coming from, reflecting and existing as part of this familiar soundscape.

The significance of this sonic symbol comes precisely from its comprehensibility within the paradigm of the sound of the Cuban homespace. There is an attempt here to communicate with their listeners a sense of shared identity; a conflation of individual and collective identities. This radio noise presents a potentially inclusionary signpost marking the parameter of an identity which, if one shares the significance of the sounds therein, one too can identify with. So the sound of flicking through the static of a radio, past salsa and speaking clocks, past crooning and revolutionary rhetoric, past histrionic *radionovelas*, to come to some end point (be it *Porno Para Ricardo* or not) invokes the sound of the Cuban home and soundscape and, to those who share in some part of that, evokes memories that can (re)confirm their individual identity, and allow them at least partial access to the space of identity forged by the band. Rather than being redefined, the sound of the Cuban home is being shared here; being brought out into the realm of collectivity. Rather like the memories in ‘*Te Acuerdas de...*’¹⁶⁴ which rely on the commonality of individual memories, the potency of these noises comes from the shared place they have in individual Cubans’ soundscapes.

As Andrew Fickers writes in his examination of the domestication of radio technology throughout 1920s Europe, “the appropriation of the radio... involved the appropriation not only of a technology of communication but also of an imagined space: the ether” (2012:412). Both these aspects are crucial to *Porno Para Ricardo*’s flickering radio signal. There is both the reclamation of a forbidden (to the band at least) medium of communication¹⁶⁵, but also the express wish to ‘map out’ a cultural space, including the band themselves within the boundaries. In ‘*Intro*’ perhaps the imagined space – the ether – is Cuban identity. Each passed station, each sound between the noises, is another point of the map. But this is an imagined Cuban identity space collated by the band themselves, a personalised account using a familiar/familial media sound (the radio) to connect together private realms of identity. Fickers goes on to write that:

This power of radio to foster cognitive visual and spatial imaging through the internal productions of “acoustic images” is a crucial aspect of radio. As Susan Douglas puts it, “The magic comes from entering a world of sound and from using that sound to make your own vision, your own dream, your own world” (Douglas, 2004:28, in Fickers, 2012:415).

This ability to imagine one’s own world is crucial to understanding *Porno Para Ricardo*’s static-and-stations radio noise. Just as Fickers claims “the introduction and promotion of the station scale must be embedded in a process of the “domestication” of the radio

¹⁶⁴ See Chapter One.

¹⁶⁵ It is perhaps worth reemphasising here that *Porno Para Ricardo*’s music receives absolutely no airplay at all within Cuba. Their music is banned from all media, including the immensely important medium of radio.

receiver” (ibid.:430) so too must Porno Para Ricardo’s ‘*Intro*’ radio noise be understood as a map of Cuban cultural identity played out to include the band themselves, if only in this imagined, fabricated rendition of a familiar medium. However, as important as the sonic mapping out of this imagined identity space, is the *dissemination to* and *collocation of* the often atomised private spaces of identity within Cuba (and particularly within alternative or non-hegemonic subcultural groups) through the reference to a shared medium.

The radio constitutes a part of a distinctly private soundscape for most people, listened to in the home as a ‘texture’ or as ‘company’ whilst engaging in domestic activities. However, turning once again to Jo Tacchi, the radio can often provide an avenue of connection between the public sound of a community and the private sound of the home. Tacchi writes that “the wider world is not shut out when we listen to the radio in the home; in fact it has a very direct channel into the most private sphere” (1998:33). The manner in which “a soundscape can operate to link the social and the private” (ibid.:36) is demonstrated in the private usages of the public signal of the radio. In many instances, it serves to allay the potential isolation of the private soundscape by connecting it with a broader community, not only through the ‘voice from without’ (the singer, news broadcaster or radio personality) being invited into the private sphere, but through the imagined and tacit connections with a community. By listening, even in private, to the same signal, these otherwise individual listeners build up a collection of shared cultural reference points, and thus are able to share certain markers of identity and common traits. When represented in music, such as this example given by Porno Para Ricardo, they can serve as an easily identifiable cultural ‘hit point’, a ‘hook’ which not only serves to incorporate Cubanness into the band’s sound, but simultaneously incorporate the band into the realm of Cubanness. Thus Porno Para Ricardo’s otherwise atomised audience, a would-be collective effectively prohibited from congregating physically by governmental censure, are provided an imagined sonic space in which to share. Crucially, it is a space peppered with the sounds of a culturally *Cuban* public sphere. Just as the remembrances evoked in Chapter One seek to construct a shared (or sharable) past for this group, so these noises seek to provide a collective space – a kind of public homespace – in which to situate them.

Although at the time the ‘*Intro*’ track was released on ‘*Rock Para Las Masa...*’ Porno Para Ricardo’s existence was not quite so liminal or threatened by institutional repression, ‘*Intro*’ serves as something of a portent of the necessity of ‘tacit communality’ as fostered by the shared experiences of the private sphere. Porno Para Ricardo’s visibility within the public realm in Cuba is scant. This means that, in Cuba, the band’s sound exists almost exclusively

through their self-recorded, self-released CDs. Though in other circumstances, and with other genres of music, these CDs could find a space in a public soundscape, through the fear of recrimination that could meet someone playing these CD in a public space, the band's sound exists primarily in the private realm; played quietly in the bedroom, listened to through headphones, shared among a small group of like-minded friends. Such a position is not desirable for a band who wish to communicate a distinct message to an audience, and who relished live performance when it was an available avenue of expression to them. Gorki has spoken candidly about this compromise:

We knew from the beginning that if we had to confront the politically correct norms imposed by the system, we had to pay a price with the media and with the institutions. The price was that we wouldn't exist... And so, obviously, we had to renounce the ever-important part of being [able to be] in direct contact with the audiences (Gorki, 2010).

To relay their desired message has been to relinquish the preferred mode of transmission. In this undesirable state of affairs, the band have created a pragmatic way in which to speak privately to their audience members. By doing so they have forged something akin to a radio-listening community, where a series of communally identifiable aspects help to foster a space of shared identity, at once inclusionary to those who recognise the pertinent sonic symbols and exclusionary to those who do not. As Gorki notes, it has led the band to “devote ourselves to recording to make up somehow for the lack of being able to have direct contact with the audience” (ibid.), and this introductory track serves to help establish that space. ‘*Intro*’ opens up a line of communication between the band and their listeners; a noise which is reminiscent of home, but it also serves to imagine a channel of communication between listeners. In lieu of the ability to congregate in public, and to create and negotiate a shared identity in that public sphere, Porno Para Ricardo use noises of the home as an integral part of their soundworld to assert that these cultural connections – these shared points of affiliation – are already in place, that a cultural map already exists, connecting this dispersed would-be community together. The sound of the radio here, rather than reforming the Cuban soundscape, seeks to establish that it already exists, and is already engrained with this contemporary Cuban identity.

The use of familiar/familial noise such as the radio, but also noises from the street, helps reinforce the notion of Porno Para Ricardo already existing within the Cuban soundworld. But by representing that same soundworld in their recordings – deliberately adding it to their sound and thus staking a claim to it as part of their identity - they are helping to connect the individualised private appreciations of their music by sounding a series of communally recognisable identity markers. Just as the radio can help bridge this gap

between the private and the public spheres of sound, so *Porno Para Ricardo*'s use of these same sounds helps form tacit group identities through shared recognitions of soundscapes. Far from being a 'noisy' signal, this representation of noises of the home also helps lend a different weight and understanding to the myriad examples of shouts and laughter peppering *Porno Para Ricardo*'s soundworld. Whereas otherwise they might be understood as little more than unavoidable in-studio camaraderie bleeding over into, and informing the direction of, the desired sounds of the instruments, in the deliberate representation of both public and private soundworlds, the two are blurred and made part of the same whole. There is a sense that the band's shouts, and maybe the noises from televisions and radios too, are bleeding in not from within (the studio), but from without, captured through an open window into the street maybe, the overheard gesticulation of a noisy neighbour perhaps. These shouts – these noises performed within the very private realm of the home studio - are afforded a sense of the public.

It is an important assertion of the separation of Cuban identity, where the public is often given over to lip-service fidelity to the Revolution (cf. Aguirre, 1984, Moses, 2000, Kapcia, 2005, Perez, 2008), and the private is where a person's 'true' identity may be expressed among a tight circle of family and friends (Sanchez, 2011). Going back to revisit Gorki's bellowed '*¡sube el volumen!*' in this new context, rather than a shout from within aimed at those *already in*, Gorki's cry could possibly be viewed as either a call to arms to those outside the immediate environs of the studio – shouting out from the CD to the listener - or else it becomes a cry of encouragement from outside, permeating the studio to give the band vocal support. Reversing the stereotyped call of the neighbour to 'turn that racket down!', the imagined neighbour here is requesting the volume be turned up for the whole block to hear. The public and private shards of Cuban identity are blurred, melded together into a more representational hue, in this individually experienced and collectively recognised noise.

By combining and confusing the sounds of the individual and the communal – the public and the private - the band are placing themselves within the tumultuous cacophony of sounds that constitute the Cuban soundscape; they become *presenters of*, but also *representative of* Cuban sound. They are staking a claim to this soundworld as theirs, and insisting that they exist as a constituent part of it. There is less of an emphasis on 'destroying' the previously existing sonic space, rather, because of the cacophonous nature of public noise, there is no need to destroy in an attempt to rebuild around oneself; one need only add one's voice into the mix.

Different Kinds of Noise

The semiotic imprint of familiar features constitutes a sense of being in place in most locations within the nation. These fixtures are not only read as signs, though, but are also felt and sensed in unreflexive fashion (Edensor, 2002:51).

Again, as with much of Porno Para Ricardo's work there are multiple interpretation of this single element ('noise') all working simultaneously, often in contradictory ways. Truly, the signal given out by the band is 'noisy', in the more orthodox sense of the word, providing a confused and hard to interpret signal. But it comes, in Russo and Warner's words, from a desire "to transmit a deliberately noisy signal" (2004:48). There are myriad different 'types' of noise layered on top of each other in the band's work. There is the incongruous noise of the saxophone, seemingly so disconnected from the rest of the piece, in '*Chachacha...*' which provides conflicting and competing auditory 'messages' to the listener. There is the volume and 'presence' of that same saxophone part which appears to mask the voice, and any 'messages' they may be seeking to emit. Then there are the voices themselves which, relegated to a background position in the track, serve as almost an indecipherable commentary on the track. Further, there are the noises added deliberately to the sound; the sounds of the bustling Havana streets, and the more intimate (though nonetheless noisy) sounds of the home permeating the band's soundworld.

By becoming so much noise themselves, all these aspects – all these many faces of noise - increase the overall noise emanating from the band in the face of analysis, and in terms of self-identification. They leave more questions, perhaps, than definitive answers; questions as to the 'true' identity – musically, politically, culturally - of Porno Para Ricardo, questions of what they are identifying with. Are they demolishing the notion of the Cuban soundscape, or adding to it, or merely reflecting its 'true' cacophonous sound? Are they putting themselves within the Cuban sound/identity, or are they positioning themselves outside of it, or denying its existence at all? Perhaps the very noise of the band serves as a comment on the fact that identity is never without 'noise', is never fixed or easily comprehensible. It exists in myriad shards, some intelligible, some applicable to the listener themselves, others backgrounded and incomprehensible. Certain aspects may serve to obfuscate the desired message the listener wishes to find, others simply annoy. One can never fully identify an individual's soundscape; a private soundworld can never be fully mapped as it is always shifting, different sounds becoming more or less important as identity changes, identity changing as sounds enforce themselves or remove themselves from the mix. Much less can one hope to define and understand a national sound (and thus identity) in its entirety. Perhaps the confusion of the signal partially lost in noise represents

a more accurate identity construction; perhaps in this instance noise is the most apposite signal for representing identity. Returning briefly to the analogy of the Aleph, then if Porno Para Ricardo might ever been said to constitute such a brilliant point of luminous oversight over the space of Cuban identity, then they are either a vista blurred and smudged by noise, or else they are looking deliberately at the blurred, overlapping and contrasting images at the very edges of the Aleph, always playing with and parodying the notion of a bounded and regulated space of identity.

Porno Para Ricardo's uses of noise are positive, demonstrating that the band exist as a legitimate constituent part of this tumultuous and shifting Cuban soundscape. But, simultaneously, they show that, through their claimed custodianship, that the Cuban soundscape exists within them; that they are, in part, the owners of this shared group of identity markers. The band use many of these identity markers to help forge a group affiliation for their tacit and atomised audience. Those who hear and recognise these noises, those that can interpret them and remember them as part of their own soundscape, can engage in a form of private-public community. This atomised audience may be fragmented physically by political censorship, but is allowed to become reformed in the auditory space of a Porno Para Ricardo song. The band forge links between these two soundscapes of the home and the communal; soundscapes at once interconnected, yet somehow separated and held apart. The melding together of the individual and the communal suggests an attempt to bring together a fragmented community, even if only through the imagination of a shared soundscape as a means to construct a shared identity.

Conclusion

It was almost three years ago that I last walked along the tree-lined street to Gorki's apartment; that day of the fortuitous first meeting, him hanging over his balcony. That day there had been a golden sun flooding through the open balcony doors, the living room had housed a clutter of furniture and lengths of timber, ready to reconstruct 'La Paja Recold' recording studio. And there was a kind of carefree atmosphere hanging over the place. Gorki seemed animated in discussing his music, but relaxed – hugging his knees and smiling through the interview. My only real concern was for the quality of the recording; eyes darting to digital screen, checking the counter was still ticking over. And I thought about this idiosyncratic, anarchic punk band, thought about how they might represent a radical (a radicalised) reinvention of Cuban music. I wanted to immerse myself in their music, to say something about what they were saying. Because they were somehow unique.

But this visit, three years later, felt so different. Of course I felt a lot more aware, the fog of confusion that opened the introduction dissipated, if not totally, then at least partially, to reveal a less romanticised image of Havana pavements and people walking them. The novelty has worn off, I suppose. The excitement of meeting the person whose band I had been studying, and the impression of the living archaeology of the city, has somewhat diminished, even if the enveloping heat has not. I felt less wide-eyed and care-free this time, less in awe of a band struggling on the fringes of a cultural system, saying what others are too afraid to. Perhaps Gorki feels the same to a certain extent. The last eighteen months have seen him travelling extensively, from Mexico, where he now lives a large part of the year, to Miami, where his acerbic lyrics continue to make the band something of a cause célèbre for certain groups (though the extent to which the musical accompaniment to these lyrics and defiant assertions is championed, or even presented, is still questionable), and recently to Poland, where he attended and spoke at an academic conference¹⁶⁶. As many Cubans have joked, there's nothing like experiencing the cultural mores of other countries to pull into sharp focus the peculiarities and frustrations of the Cuban everyday. Of course for Gorki, these agitations and frustrations have become a central spine of his musical and lyrical work. But where they may have once been

¹⁶⁶ Since my visit to Havana in late-2012, the band have travelled to Europe to play their first gigs as a full band outside of Cuba.

folded into daringly frank and sincere, yet always humorous, anecdotes, perhaps some of the lustrous observational humour has been rubbed off by years of swimming against this unmoving tide.

It is not particularly that the political situation has gotten worse in the three years since I began this dissertation. In many ways – at least in terms of new laws – there appears to be a hope of incremental change; an opening up (or a more realistic facing up) to global economic and political exchanges. Cubans can now buy and sell houses¹⁶⁷, and the scores of hand-painted ‘Se Vende’ (‘For Sale’) signs tied to balconies or fences demonstrates that many, at least in the city, are taking this opportunity. There is a renewed encouragement to open private businesses, though many appear to be focussed around the tourist industry rather than geared towards impacting the everyday lives of Cuban people. Even culturally, there seems now to be something of an increased presence of ‘other’ musical voices – both imported from without and created from within – floating through the sociocultural ether. Adele’s ‘Rolling in the Deep’ is a ubiquitous presence on state radio stations, Cuban heavy metal band ‘Hipnosis’ – headbanging through an industrial metal rendition of Queen’s ‘We Will Rock You’ with arrow-straight black hair, gothic clothes and vampire-blue contact lenses – perform on prime-time Cuban television, the slick editing and exuberance of American rap music videos similarly have made their way onto Cuban television, not (only) through illegal satellite signals, but on national stations. All this speaks of a gradual ‘opening up’ (or a recognition of their continued presence) of the channels of global cultural communication; a broader definition of the music that sounds the city, that defines and reflects a nation; a greater connectivity, a contemporary Cuba. Perhaps some of Porno Para Ricardo’s work has been done?

Yet against this sparkling constellation of potential bright points, the backdrop of stagnation, repetition and censorship, certainly in a musical sense, still seems to be as pervasive, stifling and frustrating as ever. In that first interview with Gorki, he spoke of a ‘block’ in the system that came from ‘mimetismo’ and repetition of established ideas. Now this personal complaint seems to have become a general malaise, felt and lamented by a number of Cuban musicians I spoke to¹⁶⁸. The needle still seems to be skipping on the record of

¹⁶⁷ Though, as many have noted, this new law serves only to legalise the common practice paying additional cash when ‘swapping’ houses that took place before.

¹⁶⁸ This ‘blockage’ in contemporary Cuban music is discussed in Astley (2012b).

Cubanness in many cases, repeating what has already been and refusing to push forward. Definitions and representations of what constitutes ‘Cuban’ music – and the musical reflections of Cuban identity – still seem to be as rigid, and as obsessed with (intimidated by, even) the past, its legacy and its ‘greats’, as ever. And Porno Para Ricardo are still as maligned and marginalised as ever; still unable to perform, still living with (the threat of) constant surveillance, still hampered by the epithet of ‘dissident’, still – resolutely – ‘outside the Revolution’.

* * *

A quote flowing through this work – one that really began my interest in Porno Para Ricardo as a topic for study – is that from ‘QVALibre’ rapper Frank in the documentary ‘*Cuba Rebelión*’, who describes Porno Para Ricardo as “the most censored band on the island” (2009). It is meant as something of a compliment, a marker of some sort of authenticity, perhaps even an indicator of the band’s pertinence and relevance to contemporary Cubanness. It means that their lyrical message is deemed so potent by the revolutionary system that it is in need of censorship. Indeed, it is in need of *the most* censorship.

This motif of presenting Porno Para Ricardo as an extreme point on the cultural map of Cubanness; a singular anomaly, outside the realm of ‘ordinary’ Cuban discourse is a compelling route to take. It is one that certainly informed a lot of my initial writing on the band. They somehow seem unique, completely different. If they are to be said to be representing something (anything) of a Cuban identity at all, then it is something entirely new, surely. They cannot be beholden to tradition, or to established conceptions of Cubanness, surely? If ever they do resort to such references, they must be, as in the destruction of a guitar (playing one such emblem of traditional Cubanness), as a way to deconstruct them, to obliterate them and to make something new from their shattered pieces.

But one might offer another interpretation of the above described destruction. Rather than see it as a denial of Cuban tradition – a desire to destroy it in an attempt to make something new – perhaps it should be seen as an attempt to reclaim aspects of this culture for themselves. Beyond the bluster, beyond the shock of the punk aesthetic and the reworking of socialist slogans and outspoken lyrics, this band are engaged in a reclamation of Cubanness. Theirs is not so much a break from, but an insistence on being part of, a recognisable sense of Cuban identity. And in this sense, though theirs may be a particularly vociferous voice within the mix, it is by no means a singular one. Theirs may be the ‘most censored’ band on the island, but that does not make them a singular case study, removed from their surroundings, either specifically rock music, alternative music more generally, Cuban music even more generally, or of Cuban culture more generally still.

It is in this sense that Porno Para Ricardo might be said to be an Aleph of Cubanness. Through their carefully constructed oeuvre – over which Porno Para Ricardo have, deliberately and vociferously, maintained complete autonomy – including their music videos, their album artwork, the stencilled band logos peppering Gorki’s flat, their recording studio, even their clothes and paint-adorned guitars – the band are performing an identity. They are playing out images, warped and parodic at times, utterly sincere at others, from the Cuban Aleph. They are playing out a Cuban identity. Held within the notion of ‘performing an identity’ is the need of an audience; someone to perform that identity *to*. This is the reason why Gorki’s solo performance in Prague – the visceral destruction of the Chan Chan-playing guitar, or, more recently, the full band’s performances in Spain and Poland - have been so cathartic, and why their inability to perform within Cuba is so punitive and effective. Their carefully constructed Cuban Aleph needs a viewer, requires someone to gaze through the sphere at the collated vistas within.

But the Aleph that Porno Para Ricardo proffer is perhaps not quite the shining, transparent, impartial orb of Borges’ story. Perhaps it is more punk than that; torn and

repaired with safety pins, daubed with paint and parody, stickers and cynicism? As expressed in the introduction, theirs is a partial Aleph, riven by personal injustices and clouded by personal experiences. But this partiality is not to detract from the efficacy of looking through this prism to see something of Cuban identity. Indeed, Porno Para Ricardo's work, by leading the viewer through a labyrinth of castigations and contradictions, parodies and performances, allows for so much scope, for so many differing vistas and interpretations. As such, the band's performance, held within their entire work, in a sense, becomes not only a lens through which to view Cuban identity, but also a mirror, reflecting to each viewer aspects of identity that they each wish to find. It is an assertion that tallies with, and perhaps casts new light upon, Gorki's manifesto to 'say for others what they dare not say for themselves'. By providing a space which says the shocking, and yet which retells the familiar, Porno Para Ricardo offer a space which can at least attempt to contain a wide-ranging, augmented, reconstructed, redefined, set of cultural, political, social, and aesthetic symbols of Cubanness. These symbols, as with Borges' Aleph, are then selected and seen by the viewer, made sense of by the viewer

Perhaps when I suggest that Porno Para Ricardo are an Aleph of Cubanness, a site in which (or through which) the myriad facets of Cuban identity are expressed, what I mean is that they construct a space which 'emits' (performs) an identity that can take on (almost) any characteristics, requiring a viewer to interpret and view the performance through his or her own lens, imbue it with their own significances, ideals and personality. The performed identity becomes a reflection of our own identity.

The question becomes not 'whose identity is being performed?', but rather 'who is finding themselves in the performance?'

Certainly the band are outspoken critics of the Cuban government. They deliberately and dramatically highlight failings and inequalities in the socialist system, they rally against the

bureaucracy and censorship visited upon many of Cuba's artists, and they parody and ridicule many of Cuba's 'sacred cows'; both the people and slogans held in quasi-sacrosanctity. Yet often the band do this in very personal ways; they address the inequalities and hardship experienced *personally* (and undoubtedly there is a wealth of material to draw upon). Yet this often very personal (individualised even) voice is contrasted with the notion that the band 'speak for the people'. In numerous interviews¹⁶⁹ Gorki reasserts the motivation of the band as saying for ordinary Cubans that which they are too afraid to say for themselves. The band position themselves almost as martyrs; performing a role where they say the unsayable, voice the taboo, put a personal name to the crude joke, and shout it in public, on behalf of others. They say what others may be thinking, but know they shouldn't say out loud, and they are prepared to suffer the consequences, if only to show those others that it *can* be done.

However, the counterweight to such a position is that 'on behalf of' can become 'at the behest of'. Perhaps the band are not performing some kind of holistic defiant Cuban identity, but have myriad oppositional points of view tagged onto them as symbols of opposition by numerous others. They become the opposition to whatever the audience wants them to be opposed to. The extent to which these oppositional identities could be said to be indicative of the band's 'true' or 'personal' identity is questionable. Perhaps that is the point of symbolic performance; that it opens itself up to interpretation, allowing individuals to hang their own significances upon the hooks. Porno Para Ricardo say for others what they dare not say for themselves by saying that they will say for other what they dare not say for themselves. In other words, by opening their own identity out to personal interpretation, Porno Para Ricardo allow the listener to colour the identity performed with their own ideals and values. The opposition, and thus the 'self', is individually defined in a band whose identity, I think above any finite political stance, is an

¹⁶⁹ See Placák (2006), MLC (2008), Cuba Rebelión (2009), Maza, (2010)

identity of opposition, existing ‘between’ the trenches of ideology that has forged a political and geographical schism through the notion of Cuban identity. Porno Para Ricardo are a recalcitrant presence; an other to all others.

There is always the temptation to consider Porno Para Ricardo’s open dissent, their overtly critical lyrics, their parodic artwork, as somehow contemptuous for many aspects of Cuban life. As this work has attempted to demonstrate, their contempt is not only reserved for the upper echelons of revolutionary power, but also for the acquiescence to that regime of members of the ‘rock scene’, aspects of low-level bureaucracy of the state, the timorousness of many in the face of political repression, the overbearing and simplistic rhetoric emanating from Miami. Are the band ‘angry’ at Cuba? Are they resigned to ‘being Cuban’, as their website proclaims, as just a matter of “disgraced fatalism”, or is theirs a more engaged and active relationship with the thorny issues of nation and nationalism? Are they presenting themselves as Cuban, or is the epithet bound to attach itself to them, even as they flout ‘conventional’ descriptions of their nation’s cultural identity?

Maybe the notion of a Cuba identity, either reclaimed or recontextualised is a misnomer for Porno Para Ricardo. Certainly their professed hatred of nationalism and the notion of ‘superior’, autochthonous Cuban culture would tend to suggest that the idea of ‘representing Cuba’ is not something on the band’s agenda.

Yet the paradox is that Gorki, though the authorities have endeavoured to dissuade him from returning, is adamant that he will continue to live in Cuba, despite the opportunities to leave, and despite the personal risks of staying¹⁷⁰. Despite the outright anger at many of the island’s less than perfect aspects, ‘Cuba’ is an omnipotent and omniscient force in the band’s work, and will continue to be so for as long as they continue to make music.

¹⁷⁰ As of November 2013, Gorki has now returned to Havana, and was arrested again on charges of drug possession.

Once more, and a little unsatisfyingly for a conclusion, Porno Para Ricardo sit uncomfortably – in that most punk of positions – outside of the established boundaries of Cuban spaces. They are neither Cubans within the Revolution, nor are they non-Cuban *gusanos* placed outside the Revolution. They are critical of nation, nationalism, national identities, and yet, in their recognition that the nation is an unavoidable foundation upon which their individual identities are build, combined and played out, they could be seen to conform to Arturo Arango’s depiction of the ‘Cuban artist’ for whom the nation is a “near-pathological obsession” (1997:123). Porno Para Ricardo may not ‘perform’ Cubanness in quite the same deliberate way as, for example, the Buena Vista Social Club may have (see Barker and Taylor, 2007); as a set of predetermined (and possibly externally set) conventions. But Cubanness is an integral ingredient to Porno Para Ricardo’s collective identity; it is the stage on which the performance is set, the context which helps make it intelligible.

Issues surrounding ‘what is Cuba’, ‘what (and who) is Cuban’ are, begrudgingly, perhaps, integral to the band’s existence. They are the platform upon which the band stands. They are the stage from which they perform. They are the mass of common codes, signs and cultural markers which make Porno Para Ricardo’s acerbic, grotesque, joking parodies both shocking and intelligible. As both Gorki and Ciro attest, a profound distinction needs to be made between ‘nationality’ and ‘nationalism’ in understanding *their* “obsession with identity”:

...it’s not the same to be nationalist as to live in a country and to like your country. Nationalism is a sick idea to me. Many of the things that are happening in this country that are bad are due to fundamentalism of those ideas – of nationalism. Same as fascism is nationalism. At this point in life, to continue believing in nationalism is, to me, obsolete. With each passing day, you feel like the whole world is your place to live, it’s not a little piece of land, and to defend your culture as better than others is stupid, I think. So, in my website, I say that we are not a nationalist band, but a Cuban band, because it was our geographical destiny [or assigned to us]. If we had been born somewhere else, we would have been something else. So we don’t give importance to the part of having been born in Cuba and that somehow the band wouldn’t probably work in another country, because we talk about our environment. It’s a way to explain that. So the band

wouldn't work in another country as it could work here it's made for the people that live in this country. Not by intention, but by disgrace fatalism – because it was given to us, and so we talk about what happens to us and around us (Gorki, 2010).

I am a detractor of nationalism. I hope one day we don't have to talk about countries. I think all that is silliness and I think that will happen with the new communication technologies – everything will be closer and, probably with means of transportation being more efficient, it will be easier to travel from one place to another, and there won't be a need for boundaries between countries. I don't like nationalism. All the same, I think that singing in Spanish about issues surrounding you makes you a part of that environment. You can call it 'Cubanness', you can call it a Cuban environment, or anything you like. I think creative people create from their experience. Individual experience comes from the environment the person is raised in. the environment that surrounds us is this one, so we create and take on elements from this environment. In that sense, if you like, you can infer that we are part of what you can call 'Cubanness' (Ciro, 2010).

The distinction made here by both Giro and Gorki between nationalism and national identity is important. Their work, as many other commentators, journalists, writers on freedom of speech etc, have all found overtly and abundantly is critical of revolutionary rhetoric, rallies against political dogma, parodies nationalist slogans and stances, making them seem obsolete. But even though the band may critique some of the same musical nationalism prevalent in much discourse on Cuban music, that they are still heavily invested in this same cultural space is telling. The band are inextricably inculcated in this world of Cuban cultural identity; their music, they claim, is a relevant and representative part of that space. Their music is Cuban. They exist as a part of that space of Cubanness, and in turn, what is Cuban can be seen within their work.

Of course, as noted in the introduction, it is difficult to claim such a totality, even of a more limited space than Borges' infinite Aleph, for such an analytical tool. Not only would it be impossible for Porno Para Ricardo to house a reflection of all aspects of a space (even if one were to pare down the proposed space to, as in this work, a more manageable and realistic, though still admittedly vast, size, such as 'contemporary Cuban identity'), and not only would it be impossible for one viewer to report upon all the vistas available, any work that would even attempt such an endeavour would be destined to follow the arduous (and impossible) route of the poet Daneri, to produce a narrative of everything, which would

present “sprawling, lifeless hexameters lack[ing] even... relative excitement” (1945:4), but, which is worse, would profess to present a holistic picture, but which would, by its very nature, have myriad more omissions than additions.

Again, a dual filter – of subject reflecting space, and of writer analysing these reflections - needs to be recognised here. *Porno Para Ricardo*, clearly, are not capable of representing the totality of constituent elements of Cuban identity, nor can such a work as this hope to represent all the fragments the band *do* examine. This work, then, is a fragment of a fragment, a partial account of a partial reflection of a much wider and variegated identity. But that, again, is not to negate the work herein, rather to enforce a kind of real-world application upon a supernatural (and unreal) device. This work takes six short glances through a potential Aleph, finds six different, though interconnected, vistas from within the totality of contemporary Cuban space. They are coloured, warped, maybe, and blurred, no doubt, by the prism of the real-world (false) Aleph through which they are viewed – *Porno Para Ricardo* – as well as by the ‘ocular adjustments’ necessarily made by the viewer/writer. But they are nonetheless relevant and real reflections. In the defiant last words from Daneri to Borges, “Of course, if you don't see it, your incapacity will not invalidate what I have experienced” (1945:8). These partial fragments of Cuban identity are not aimed at producing an epic poem of eternal length, nor are they invalidated, necessarily, by contrasting, or contradictory, visions proposed by other viewers from other potential Alephs.

But as asserted in the introduction, this dual partiality is not necessarily a limitation to the efficacy of this theoretical tool in practice, rather it could be seen as a strength. Given that this theoretical approach of gazing through the Aleph requires not only a vista (or series of vistas) but also a viewer, then perhaps it is an apposite model for the type of autoethnographic writing proposed by both Roxanne Lynn Doty (2010) and Elizabeth Dauphinee (2010); a style of writing that refuses to present itself as fixed and authoritative,

impartial and objective. A style of writing that allows “the reader to see the intentions – and not just the theories and methodologies – of the researcher (Dauphinee, 2010). A style of writing that encourages participation more than observation, that can be dialogical and honest about the presence of the ‘self’ of the writer, as well as recognising the partialities – the ‘selves’ – of the subjects as they critique, construct and reflect their own sense of Cuban identity.

I think such a writing style, such a theoretical tool for analysis, has been particularly effective in analysing, describing and encountering the work of Porno Para Ricardo. Indeed much of their oeuvre could be said to be ‘autoethnographic’ in much the same ways in which Doty and Dauphinee describe. They rally against fixidity, they assert their intentions – even when those intentions are unclear even to the band themselves – in a direct and declamatory manner, they put themselves resolutely into every aspect of their work, make no distinction between themselves and their work, they encourage dialogue, confrontational as it may be, but out in the open, livid and enacted, participatory and free from assumed truths. When writing about such an autoethnographic band, a methodological device such as the Aleph is not only useful, but truthful.

Porno Para Ricardo’s Aleph shines from the social, political, even cultural, margins of Cuban society. They are not a beacon at the centre of the cultural sphere, burning bright. They flicker, bitter, at the edges. They speak of themselves, and for themselves. They sneer and sing of their own encounters with the rigid edges of Cuban hegemonic powers – political and cultural (if a distinction can easily be drawn between these two words) – and they collect anecdotes in enforced isolation. But yet, despite this isolation and marginalisation, perhaps even because of it, they are afforded an engaging and somewhat unique position within the field of Cuban cultural identity. Not quite an ‘outside-looking-in’ perspective, not quite ‘within’ either, they problematise many of the assumedly non-traversable dichotomies of Cubanness, particularly that most overt of Fidel Castro’s

maxims proclaiming spaces ‘within’ and ‘outside’ the Revolution. From these liminal cracks between the spaces of Cuban identity, Porno Para Ricardo make their music. And perhaps it is in these most liminal of places that Alephs, as described by Borges, might be found. In quiet corners, in darkened cellars, in a soundproofed recording studio buried in a suburban art deco apartment block where a punk band tell their erstwhile leader *‘no come tanta pinga, comandante’*¹⁷¹

But really, the question of whether Porno Para Ricardo *really* can, or *really* do, encapsulate ‘all that is Cuban’ into one shining sphere of punk performance is something of a moot point. Treating them as such, giving them that agency from the outset, looking through such a sphere that is at least partially constructed by myself as a writer/researcher, provides a moment of reflection on the complexities of identity construction, provides a vista from which to look out over the cultural space of Cubanness and reflect on some of its more engaging scenes and scenery. But the real advantage of such a device, is that, given its scope of visions, one may also ‘look back’ at oneself – may even look at oneself looking through the Aleph! – and thus promote a sense of self-reflexivity desired and required in autoethnographic writing.

* * *

We’d been told that they would be starting promptly at 1pm, and that if we wanted to sit in and watch, we’d have to get there before then because once they began playing, they wouldn’t be able to hear telephone or doorbell from the noisy enclosed sanctuary of the rehearsal space/recording studio. So at 12:30 we walked past the pre-Revolution, Modernist-relic Catholic church at one end of the street, past a small gang of children running after a burst football, each wearing replica Barcelona or Real Madrid football shirts, swearing joyously, past two middle-aged men with thick black moustaches quietly washing a chipped and

¹⁷¹ *no come tanta pinga, comandante*¹⁷¹ is the chorus to the band’s most (in)famous song ‘El Comandante’.

rusted dark blue Moscovitch with a dirty chamois cloth and a small bucket full of brown water, and finally past, the inner-voice of self-censorship reminded me, the hidden surveillance cameras and past the unseen, untold number of note-taking chivatas to Gorki's apartment.

But this time, through the barrage of everyday images, we saw Gorki tumble down the cream coloured steps of the apartment building carrying a heavy-framed black bicycle and grocery bag. Self-censorship, coupled with an exhaustion from a blistering heat (despite the 'fresher' mid-winter, the sun had been radiating down with a intensity that stung skin and drained energy over the last few days) stopped us from calling out his name in the street. A vision in black with wild curly hair, Gorki hopped on the bicycle and pedalled away one-handed, adjusting the bag over his shoulder as he went, with pace, across the crossroad and down the continuation of his leafy cracked-pavement avenue. For a moment we stood outside the entrance.

And a moment later, we were knocking on the garishly painted door of La Paja Recold, for no other reason than the top floor corridor offered a shade away from prying eyes. Of course there was no answer, but we waited outside for close to an hour, re-enacting a familiar Cuban state of waiting for an ill-defined something to happen to resolve the current situation and end the wait... anything to end the wait. We ended our self-imposed, two-person queue as we began it; hot, tired and no closer to a conclusion.

* * *

Around 5pm on that languid afternoon, the sun just beginning to loosen its grip on the day, Gorki finally picked up the phone we had been fruitlessly ringing all afternoon. Band practice was now going to begin in twenty minutes. So back we walked through the avenidas and calles, ducking under the trimmed dreadlock branches-turning-into-roots of the ficus trees lining each street, climbing over upturned paving slabs, to Gorki's apartment, to La Paja Recold.

We took our shoes off as a matter of course this time. Old Marshall and Fender amps were already humming, the air conditioning unit breathing ice air into the small practice space. Gorki had changed from the demure, inconspicuous all-black attire we had seen him in earlier, into a garish Hawaiian shirt - orange and peach coloured splashes on white - bright red drainpipe trousers and thick rimmed Ray Ban glasses; a

kind of re-enactment of the cool, crisp late-40s architecture of the Playa neighbourhood in Havana... all until the shock of black curly hair.

All the equipment in the small room – the room itself – ‘looks’ punk. Stickers, hand-painted and stencilled band logos and slogans, crudely drawn pictures, posters of other bands all adorn the walls¹⁷². But behind the aesthetic is highly professional equipment, and as the practice begins with little conversation and superfluous noise, it becomes clear that the method of rehearsal is equally as professional. Behind the boisterousness, after the laughter at Gorki crooning the title of the first track ‘¿sabes tú cómo joder a un comunista?’ (‘do you know how to fuck a communist?’) into the microphone, came a studied silence around the noise of the track. Porno Para Ricardo play with a meticulousness and attention to detail that is often omitted from descriptions of their music, and from the ‘bedroom’ and ‘DIY’ aesthetics more generally. As the song unwinds to a conclusion – a slowing down, followed by a tight riff played by the bass before a flurry of cymbals and distortion – Ciro – who appears now to be leading the practice in terms of re-rehearsing the details of each track – shakes his head and stops playing. This end section – what sounds like a kind of semi-structured dissolution – is not tight enough. They take it from the final chorus. This time Ciro doubles the bass part, and again it is not precise. Again they practice the same portion of the song, this time Ciro conducting with the headstock of his Fender. The four members turn inwards into a tight circle, each concentrating on the guitar neck of another. Eventually the part is worked out to satisfaction, and they move on.

The band return to standing in ‘gig’ formation, Gorki out front, Ciro to ‘stage’ right, bass player William turned slightly to drummer Renay at the back of the room, directly underneath the stream of cold air billowing from the air conditioner. As they launch into the next song, ‘El General’ - a song as acerbic and critical of Cuba’s perennial “number two” Raúl Castro as their most infamous song ‘El Comandante’ is of his predecessor - there is a feeling of a live gig. A frisson of energy rippled around the soundproof room. The band members each lean into their microphones a little more, each went to surreptitiously turn up their individual amps. Tentative pogoing in the low-ceiling room. Knowing smiles of familiarity flashed between

¹⁷² See appendix for photos.

members. Perhaps that I was wedged as unobtrusively as possible in the corner of the room, tissue paper balled up and jammed into ears, taking photos and making scrawled notes as discretely as possible, affected the performance of the rehearsal, but as the song marched onward, it felt more as though the performance was emanating from, and redoubling within, the band members themselves. As the bellowed chorus of 'Raúl, Raúl' comes as a climax to the song, Ciro stops leaning against the wall, and jumps into the microphone, Renay hunches over the drums with intent and William, low-slung bass swinging around his knees, pogo (a little self-consciously) on the spot. Gorki, for his part, snarls and contorts when playing his low-slung guitar with all the intent and vigour of the performance I saw a year and a half ago in Prague. He shuts his eyes from staring into the middle distance beyond the smudged piece of glass separating them from the control room, and I imagine that he sees a sea of clamouring Cuban punks bellowing the words back to him and his band.

The song finishes, and the imagined gig is put on hold again to amend another imperfection. This time it is the ending chorus, in particular who should sing what, where. There is some discussion between Ciro and Gorki, and the segment of the song is rehearsed several times, each time Ciro jumping up from his position leaning back against the wall and shaking his head. Renay studies the air conditioner remote. William plays with a concentration, occasionally looking at us wedged in the corner with darting black-brown eyes, and across to Ciro when he plays a wrong note or misses a backing vocal. He is only 19, half the age of the other members of the band. He joined about a year ago, and with his shaved head, plaid shirt and heavy black boots and extensively tattooed arms, he looks every inch the classic 'Oi' punk.

The band then launch into 'El Comandante', and still there is a smile that ripples around the band as the lyrics begin. Again, eyes close and the imaginary audience returns. Ciro, taking the lead vocals, grins into the microphone. His bald forehead and black beard and vaguely feline features make him look a little like a reincarnated (wilder) Lenin. There is no need to re-rehearse any of this song. It is performed perfectly, and as it draws to a close, the four members of the band look to each other laughing. Gorki pours another generous slug of rum into his glass, and they continue on to another song.

But the practice is short. They play only six or seven songs in total, and abruptly seem to bore of the rehearsal. Pulling open the heavy wooden door with a sharp tug, Gorki says “back to reality” and laughs defiantly before disappearing off into his room clutching the bottle of rum we had brought him as a present. Ciro silently slinks back to the computer screen, opening a Protools session to obsessively tinker with a small section of a bass guitar track. The band are dispersed throughout the small apartment, and the rehearsal is over. But ten minutes or so later, they reconvene in the control room. Ciro puts on a song from the new album and we tell jokes, stories from childhood, talk briefly of North Korea. We talk about good music in Cuba and England, concede that there is very little in either country. Gorki fumes that a popular Cuban pop-rock band may have stolen Porno Para Ricardo’s lyric ‘a mi no me gusta la politica, pero yo le gusta a ella, compañero’.

* * *

And as I sat watching four friends on a Saturday afternoon playing music in their house, telling stories and laughing, I was struck by how different my intentions, my perceptions of the band, were at the beginning of this thesis. I began with the notion that Porno Para Ricardo represented some sort of radical ‘new’ conception of Cuban identity; a dissident face of resistance; an anarchic standard-bearer for a reinvigorated musical subculture. But being here now, watching discussions and repetitions of bass riffs and backing vocals, watching the conversations and anecdotes, has crystallised an encroaching realisation of how *ordinary* all of this is; how everyday it is that four friends would get together to make music.

In a sense it’s a disconcerting point to conclude with. The band, as I have grown to realise, are not the infamous *bête noire* of the Revolution. They are not the face of a radically reinterpreted Cubanness. They are just another band. Of course, there are political circumstances that swirl around them, and perhaps it is this very repression from a state-level that has kept the band as relatively unknown and unable to act as the agents of social,

political and, above all, *musical* change within Cuba that they might otherwise have been.

But, as Gorki said in our interview in 2010, something I didn't fully pick up on at the time, so focussed was I on discovering the radical punk message of the band, the outward vitriol of the band has perhaps mellowed over time to become a more inward-looking and self-contained musical expression:

...perhaps before, I was trying to make music in line with what is allegedly and stereotypically thought to be 'punk'. Now I don't ask those questions as much. For me, punk is something else which is much broader. In that sense perhaps I have evolved, but basically, we can say that PPR is the same since it started, but it has evolved in concept, musical concept. That is, we don't concern ourselves so much with accepted conventions, that for me are prejudices, that allegedly belong to the genre, to the style... Of course, we don't expect everyone to be like us. It's impossible. I don't get in that critical mindset that I used to have before. I used to be a lot more radical in that sense before. But now, one has to put things in a balance. (Gorki, 2010)

Porno Para Ricardo may exist now primarily for themselves. A conversion, perhaps, has taken place from the martyrological mantra of "saying what other's daren't" to the more personal, more quotidian idea of 'saying what *we* want to, to ourselves'.

Maybe, in the end, this is what makes the band so interesting to me, what makes them 'worthy' of study. Throughout this thesis, I have detailed the manner in which Porno Para Ricardo reflect and represent aspects of the everyday in Cuba – the socio-cultural framework of a Cuban identity. And in a sense, I felt that the brash punk of the music made these socio-cultural pointers stand out all the more, perhaps as a device to augment the sonic space of Cuban music, and increase the pool of genres and musicians to whom the term could be applied, or who could legitimately stake a claim to the term as 'theirs'. But their music – the precise and professional DIY aesthetic, the small-group insularity – are perhaps as much a part of the everyday aesthetic as the lyrical and thematic tropes pulled out in this thesis.

If anything, this is what makes the band an Aleph of Cuban cultural identity: not how 'outside' the Revolution they are, not how dissident, how outspoken, how direct they are,

but how normal, how commonplace – in the most positive sense of the word – what they do is. Their practice of making music *is* the everyday, not just a vehicle for reflecting it.

* * *

And then, as I reach this conclusion, and ready myself to submit this work, a ripple of indignation erupts across social media and Cuban-oriented websites. Gorki has, once again, been arrested on spurious drug charges. This time, the offending drugs are his epilepsy medication, bought from Mexico.

And once more, Porno Para Ricardo become, intentionally or not, the standard bearers of ‘political dissidence’ emanating from within Cuba. Once more, their position within contemporary Cuban society, their carved-out niche of Cuban expression, is hampered, squeezed and made difficult. Once more, the band’s ability to express their everyday experience of Cuba becomes a little more difficult, as their desire to voice it becomes ever more resolute.

Appendix

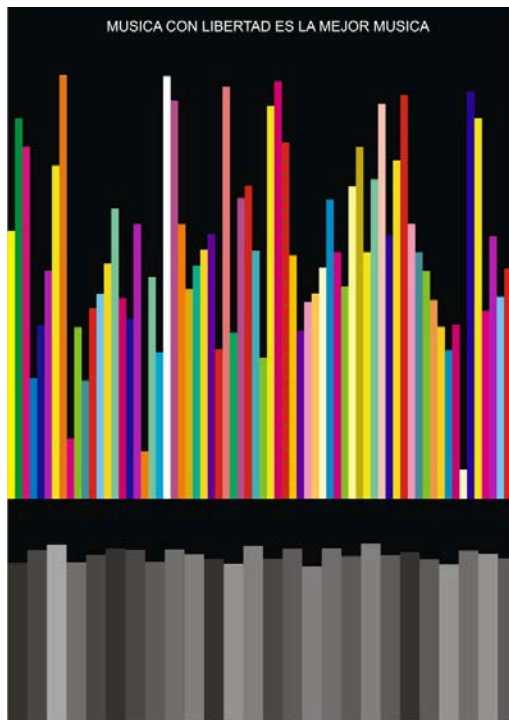
From p.18: Interviewing Gorki and Ciro, Havana, May 2010



From p.19: Porno Para Ricardo's Hammer and Sickle Logo



From p.20: Examples of Porno Para Ricardo's artwork and t-shirts



YO  ODIO LOS CASTRO



From p.23: Gorki's prison bolero band poster



U N I D A D
TOLEDO

RUMBO a la EXCELENCIA
CONDUCTUAL



POR NUEVOS CAMINOS

From p. 58: *‘Te acuerdas de...?’* Lyrics

**¿Te acuerdas de los muñequitos?
Los que ponían to’ los días igualitos.
¿Te acuerdas de nuestra merienda?
La mantequilla y los panes cangrejitos.**

Do you remember the cartoons?
They put on exactly the same ones every day
Do you remember our afternoon snacks?
Butter and ‘*cangrejito*’ breads

**¿Te acuerdas de nuestro dinero?
Había mas cosas y to’ costaba mucho menos.
¿Te acuerdas del Coparum?
Era la playa de los friquis por entero**

Do you remember our money?
There were more thing and everything cost much less
Do you remember the ‘*Coparum*’
It was all the beach of the ‘*friquis*’

**y todo eso se ha perdido porque estamo’ en comunismo
y todo eso se ha perdido porque estamos construyendo
y todo eso lo perdimos porque estamos avanzando....
De cabeza pa’l abismo.**

And all this has been lost because we are in communism
And all this has been lost because we are constructing
And all of this has been lost because we are advancing...
Heading for the abyss

**¿Te acuerdas de nuestros maestros?
Los de verdad no los que ahora nos han puesto.
¿Te acuerdas de nuestras jevitas?
Daban su culo sin cobrarte la tarifa.**

Do you remember our teachers?
The real ones, not those that they’ve given us now
Do you remember our girlfriends?
They’d give their asses without charging you a fee

**¿Te acuerdas del Patio e’ María?
Pa’l rock el único singao lugar que había.**

Do you remember ‘El Patio de María’?
For rock, it was the only fucking place we had

¿Te acuerdas de la Libertad?

Do you remember freedom?

From p.64: Gorki smashing Soviet guitar



From p.67: '*Mi Balsa*' lyrics

**Ya mi balsa se va a hundir
a nadar hasta Miami,
ya mi balsa se va ha hundir oh yeah
y que rico esta el oleaje.**

Now my raft has sunk
I am swimming to Miami
Now my raft has sunk, oh yeah
How nice the waves

**El pinche carpintero me timó con esta balsa
me dijo que era buena que flotaba que flotaba,
y ahora que me he roto y mi balsa va pa'l fondo
no se si estoy nadando pa' Miami o para el morro.**

That bloody carpenter cheated me with this raft
he told me it was good, that I would float
and now it has broken and my raft has sunk to the bottom
I don't know if I am swimming towards Miami or 'el Morro'

**Ya mi balsa se va a hundir
igualito que el Titánic
ya mi balsa se va ha hundir oh yeah
que linda la noche cae.**

Now my raft has sunk
exactly like the Titanic
now my raft has sunk, oh yeah
how beautiful the nightfall

**El pinche carpintero esta gozando mi dinero
Mas que le ruegue a dios que yo no llegue a cayo hueso,
lo voy a reclamar y el día que llegue su vuelo
le voy a disparar na'má que ponga un pie en el suelo**

That bloody carpenter is partying with my money
He better pray to God I don't reach Cayo Hueso
Cause I'll claim him and the day his flight arrives
I'll shoot him the minute he steps on land

**ya mi balsa se va hundir
ahí vienen los tiburones
con varias filas de dientes oh yeah
a morderme los cojones.**

Now my raft has sunk
here come the sharks
with many rows of teeth, oh yeah
to bite off my bollocks

**Porque ya nos quitaron to’ el espacio
porque no existimos pal’ poder
porque somos héroes del fracaso
porque no hay futuro porque no hay porque**

because they have removed all our space
because we don’t exist for the power
because we are heroes of the failure
because there’s no future, because there is no ‘because’

**vámonos pa’ G que no hay nada que hacer
vámonos pa’ G que no hay nada que hacer
vámonos pa’ G que no hay nada que hacer
vámonos pa’ G que no hay nada que hacer**

let’s go to G, because there’s nothing to do
let’s go to G, because there’s nothing to do
let’s go to G, because there’s nothing to do
let’s go to G, because there’s nothing to do

**Voy pa’ G que quitaron la corriente
Y si no me la quitan voy también
Voy también si vuelven a abrir el Patio
Y si no hay pastillas, yo me voy pa’ G**

I go to G when they remove the power
And if they don’t remove me, I go as well
Also, I will go if they return to open ‘*el Patio*’
And if there are no pills, I will go to G

From p.104: 'Comunista Chivatón' lyrics

*El singao chivatón Alpidio Alonso
no quiere que los Porno toquen mas
Alpidio Alonso dice que no que no que el no está en na´
y cuando le dicen que quieren invitarnos a tocar
Alpidio Alonso no deja que vallamos a quemar*

The fucking snitch Alpidio Alonso
doesn't want Porno to play any more
Alpidio Alonso says no, no, that he's not into anything
but when someone wants to invite us to play
Alpidio Alonso doesn't want us to go and burn

*Alpidio Alonso no es mas que un comunista chivatón
que se hizo una casa con el dinero de la asociación
y escribe unos verzos que nadie quiere oírlos porque son
muy malos muy malos le va mejor el roll de chivatón, chivatón*

Alpidio Alonso is nothing more than a communist snitch
he built a house with the Money of the association
he writes verses that nobody wants to hear because they are
very bad, very bad, the role of snitch suits him better

*Es Alpidio el comunista chivatón. Es Alpidio el comunista chivatón
El singao comunista chivatón. Si algun día fue poeta yo ese día fui escultor
Es Alpidio el comunista chivatón. Es Alpidio el comunista chivatón
El singao comunista chivatón, porque el tipo es comunista y ademas un chivatón*

Alpidio is a communist snitch. Alpidio is a communist snitch
The fucking communist snitch. If he was ever a poet, then I was a sculptor
Alpidio is a communist snitch. Alpidio is a communist snitch
The fucking communist snitch, because the guy is a communist and also a snitch

*Alpidio Alonso, el jefe al mando de la asociación
el quiere botarnos y eso es lo mejor que se le ocurrió
no nos hace falta estar en tu mierdera institución
adios imbesil que sepas que esta banda es la mejor*

Alpidio Alonso, the boss in charge of the association
he wants to throw us out, and that's the best he could think of
we don't need to be in your shitty institution
goodbye imbecile, just so you know this band is the best

From p.108: '*La Agencia del Rock*' lyrics

**Con sus juntas directivas. Con sus cangrejos de oficina
Con su escasa protein, y sus buenas policies
Con sus mentes de gallina. Sin el Patio de María
Con su Buena repression, y con su infame asociación**

With their joint directives. With their little crabs in office
With their limited protein, and their great policies
With their chicken minds. Without the *Patio de María*
With their great repression, and with their infamous association

**Fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck el moviniento del rock
Fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck con la agencia del rock
Fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck con la pistol makarov
Fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck nunca hubo una revolución**

Fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck the rock movement
Fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck with the rock agency
Fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck with a makarov pistol
Fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck it never had a revolution

**Con el ministro y su peluca. Con esos premios Lucas
Con el audio que no suena. Con el viaje de Venezuela
Con la envidia de los puercos. Con Lennon de monument
Con sus putas tortilleras. Estamos fritos en la cazuela**

With the minister and his wig. With those Lucas awards
With the audio that doesn't sound. With trips to Venezuela
With the envy of the pigs. With Lennon in monument
With their lesbian bitches. We're fired in the pan

**Fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck. Ay, este rock que no suena
Fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck. Ay qué pena qué pena
Fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck. Están copiando donde quiera
Fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck. Y a mi me sigue la diarrea**

Fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck. Oh, this rock that doesn't sound
Fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck. What a shame, what a shame
Fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck. They are copying what they want
Fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck. And it gives me diarrhoea

From p.111: *Black Metal* lyrics

**Cuando era un niño era un vampiro
Después cuando crecí descubrí que también era un hombre lobo
Por eso ahora que soy friky lo que me gusta es el**

When I was a boy, I was a vampire
Afterwards , when I grew up, I discovered that I was also a werewolf
Because of that, now I am a Friki, and what I like is

**black metal, black metaaaaal
nosotros somos malos cantidad
black metal, black metaaaaal
ay ay ay ay ay ay**

black metal, black metal
we are really bad
black metal black metal
ay ay ay ay ay

**el otro día por la noche me fuí par la G a frikiar
y saben lo que descubrí ja ja
descubrí que hay un piquete nuevo de black metal
enseguida corrí donde Toni para que me lo quemara
y así ser el primero en tenerlo y así ser el mas friky de todos los friky
saben como se llama, se llama.....**

The other night I went to G to '*frikiar*'
And guess what i discovered (ha ha)
I discovered a new black metal band
So I immediately ran to Toni so he could burn me a copy
So I could be the first one to have it, and I could be the most *friki* of all the *frikis*
do you know what its called, it's called

**black metal, black metaaaaal
oh cuanta maldad
black metal, black metaaaaal
empuñamos la espada del mal
black metal, black metaaaaal
no puedo llegar tarde a mi casa porque entonces
me regaña mi mamá.**

Black metal black metal
Oh, how much badness
Black metal black metal
We grasp the sword of badness
Black metal black metal
I can't arrive home too late, otherwise
my mum will tell me off

From p. 150: '*Peste a Ratas*' lyrics

**Creo que huele a rata y en su madriguera buscan sus migajas
Esto es algo muy simple tienen su dinero sin hacer nada.
Se la pasan todo el día repitiendo el discurso de papá cucaracha
No hay que ser muy inteligente si quieres ser rata ven y súmate a la banda.**

I think it smells of rat and in their den they search for crumbs
This is very simple, they get their money without doing anything
They spend all day repeating father cockroach's speech
You don't have to be very intelligent, if you want to be a rat come and join the band

**Pero mi vida, pero mi cielo, pero yo quiero viajar al extranjero
Pero mi vida, pero mi cielo, pero yo quiero viajar al extranjero
Como no me voy a reír de la asociación Hermanos Saiz
Como no me voy a reír de la asociación Hermanos Saiz**

But my love, but my darling, I want to travel abroad
But my love, but my darling, I want to travel abroad
How can I not laugh at the AHS
How can I not laugh at the AHS

**Hay una cosa muy fea que pasa en las cloacas de todo el sistema
Hay ratas rojas y verdes serpientes con barba que se dan la lengua
Unas llegan a presidente y las otras las pobres se van a la casuela**

There is something really ugly going on in the sewerage of the whole system
There are red rats and green snakes with beards that give each other the tongue
Some become president and the other poor ones go into the pot

From p. 170: 'Chachacha, que malo el basilon'

**A las frikis hay que darle por culo, A las repa embutirle el pingón
A las mikis mamarles su bollo, Pero todas gozan el rock and roll**

To the frikis, you have to give it to them in the ass, to the *repa* you stick in the big cock
To the *mikis*, you lick their pussy, But they all enjoy rock and roll

**Rock and roll, que rico es rock and roll, Cha cha cha, que malo es cha cha cha
Rock and roll, que rico es rock and roll, Cha cha cha, que malo es cha cha cha**

Rock and roll, how great is rock and roll, Cha cha cha, how bad is cha cha cha
Rock and roll, how great is rok and roll Cha cha cha, how bad is cha cha cha

**Unas sueñan con el papa rojo, Otras quieren vivir en Japón
Otras quieren tener una novia, Pero todas gozan el reguetón**

Some dream with 'red daddy', Others want to live in Japan
Some want a girlfriend, But they all enjoy reggaeton

**Reguetón, que feo el reguetón, Rock and roll, que bueno el rock and roll
Cha cha cha, que rico el cha cha cha, Rock and roll está mejor mejor**

Reggaeton, how ugly is reggaeton, Rock and roll, how good is rock and roll
Cha cha cha, how great is cha cha cha, Rock and roll is much better

**bacilón, que rico el bacilón, cha cha cha, que rico es cha cha cha
bacilón, que malo esta el bacilón, cha cha cha, donde esta el cha cha cha?
Rock and roll, que bueno el rock and roll, bacilón, que malo esta el bacilón**

The party, how great is the party, cha cha cha, how great is cha cha cha
The party, how bad is the party, cha cha cha, where is the cha cha cha?
Rock and roll, how good is rock and roll, the party, how bad is the party.

From p. 167: Gorki and 'Porno Para Ricardo' in Prague, selected photos





From p.199: Gorki's front door



From p. 199: Pictures of stencilled artwork in La Paja Recold.



From p. 199: Pictures of Porno Para Ricardo band practice







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